

*The*  
SHIP  
BEAUTIFUL



A TWO-FOLD TALE






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THE SHIP  
BEAUTIFUL



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# THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

*A Two-fold Tale*

*By*

C. R. ALLEN

For I have seen,  
Pointing its shapely shadows from the dawn,  
An image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,  
A drowsy ship of some yet older day.

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

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## FOREWORD

**T**HE SHIP BEAUTIFUL" is a book to be read by every child from seven to seventy, or from eight to eighty, or, for that matter, from nine to ninety. It is called a two-fold tale, and this duality of purpose is the dominating charm of the work. It is the record of a jolly, lovable little boy, and of his uncle who dwells with a brave heart and a fine mind in the shadow of sadness. The pair are the best of friends, and between them they build up the wonder-story which makes the tale within the tale. It is a vivid creation, imaginative, fantastic, humorous, delicately rendered in poetic thought. It should delight all who love the chronicles of fairyland and the music of Oberon's Horn.

JUSTIN HUNTLY McCARTHY.

TO BRIAN

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE BRAILLE SCRIPT OF  
RICHARD BURNARD, AND HERE SET FORTH BY  
C. R. ALLEN.

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# The Ship Beautiful

## CHAPTER I

### APOLOGIA PRO LIBRO SUO

Just for a little space the dun cloud parted,  
And light broke through that glints on faery lands :  
And you and I were regal and light-hearted  
With governance of kingdoms on our hands.

Kingdoms where all that's wrong is bravely righted,  
And none are damned or hopeless of reprieve,  
Where folly's always drubbed and virtue knighted.  
The fond and happy realm of make-believe.

Nursing your knee you listened, planned and wondered,  
A little while the light of Merlin shone.  
Yes, I'll remember how the cloud was Sundered,  
Though now it's dark again, for you are gone.

Putting away all childish things to-morrow  
You'll face the serried facts of common day :  
But I'll remember, and perchance we'll borrow  
Long after from the child you put away.

Anonymous.

I HAVE just returned to my little shack after hearing Moira read Brian's first letter from school. It was a guarded epistle, but I think that both his mother and I read much between the lines. My nephew has not yet found his feet. This is the first break in his life. As I sat and listened I came to realize what a very happy and sheltered life it

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has been, and perhaps I allowed myself to think that I may have done a little to make it so. It was hard to believe that Brian would not slip into that fragrant and consoling room of Moira's at any moment, so much was he part and parcel of the place.

"There, that's over," said his mother as she folded the letter, "and I'm feeling this afternoon that something else is over, too."

She began singing softly to herself as she poured out the tea, something of Fiona McLeod's I think it was.

"Yes, the poets do help a little," I said, as I took my cup, "but I shall refrain from quoting Wordsworth although he has written the finest lines there are to be found for an occasion such as this."

"I know," said Moira, "'Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy.'"

"Oh, well," I said, "it might have been worse. He hasn't gone off to the wars. He will be back for the holidays before you can turn round."

"Something has come to an end," murmured

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Moira with all the tugging sadness of a Celtic woman's fatalism in her voice.

" Oh, dash it all, Moira," I said, " I hope you're not going to start keening. Let's save what we can from the wreck. After all, life consists of picking up the bits. What sort of a hole do you think Brian has left in my life by flitting off to school ? "

Moira crossed to where I sat, and patted me on the forehead.

" I know, Dick," she said. " It's because that's over, too, that I'm all ready to cry."

" Youth will be served," I said, as I caught her hand in mine. " He may need me again. Did he ever tell you about the boy on the box ? "

" I really don't know," she replied. " Was that one of his romances ? "

" It was our romance. It has just occurred to me that it might be worth preserving."

With that I rose, and overturned the cake basket, the only thing in Moira's drawing-room I consider out of place.

" Life consists of preserving what you can

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from the wreck," I repeated. "Can anything be salvaged for Jerry's tea?"

"I'm so glad you did that, Dick," said Moira; "it has brought me back to what has to be done."

I did what I could to help her set things to rights, and then made my way off. Now I am seated at my table. I have launched upon an enterprise which I hope will bring its reward.

"Ink is my opium," quoth Diana of the Crossways, and, since I am denied the consolations of that narcotic, Braille shall be mine.

Time was when I held the memory of Dr. Braille in no better favour than does the schoolboy in the case of Euclid. His absurd little dots straggled over the paper like a routed army. However, Braille was part of the curriculum at St. Dunstan's, and as my instructress was beautifully manicured and apt to teach, I submitted to the humiliation of learning my letters over again with a good grace, and gradually mastered the pattern of pin-pricks that was set before me. Now that I have the good doctor's system literally at my fingers' ends I

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cannot think how I could have found it in my heart to upbraid him. The little dots leap out at me from books old and new, and I believe I have found in my Stainsby-Wayne writer what Meredith's lady of the Crossways found in her ink pot, the means wherewith to give melancholy the slip. When I have finished a hard day at my organ, and feel, like Abt Vogler, the need of sleep, there is nothing I find so restful as the manipulation of the six keys with which the Braille writer is furnished.

Up to the present I have contented myself with transcribing excerpts from my favourite authors, but this evening I launch upon a literary venture. Samuel Pepys wrote in cipher for his own pleasure. I shall follow Mr. Pepys, and maybe a Reverend Mr. Jones of some later day will come upon my script and give the result of my inspired punchings to an appreciative world. Perhaps it would be fairer, seeing how much Brian is involved, if I were to bequeath this work to him along with my War Bonds and my shares in the Night Watchman, with a request that he should decipher it for him-

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self when he reaches the age of twenty-one. He has sufficient knowledge of the system to do this.

Know you then, Brian Burnard, only son of Gerald Burnard, indenting agent of the city of Dunedin, that what I am going to attempt in the following pages (I will tie them in bundles of fifty for your better handling of them) is to set forth the story of the Boy on the Box as we worked it out between us. I want you to have first of all our story, that is to say the story of Christopher, the Boy on the Box, but about it and around I want you to come upon another story, and this a true one. At the risk of being considered sentimental, I shall call it the story of the boy who brightened some of the way for a blind man. When you are twenty-one it will not hurt you to know how much your coming and going meant to me.

My repeater tinkles out midnight. I think I mastered that Bach this morning, but the pedalling took it out of me. However, the little dots have acted as anodyne, "so now I will try to sleep."

## CHAPTER II

### THE COMING OF THE PACKING-CASE

Your argosies are richly come to harbour.

Merchant of Venice.

IT was somewhere in the autumn of 1921 that Brian first made the acquaintance of Christopher, though it was not until some weeks later that the boy on the box received his second name. The hilly suburb where my cottage stands at the foot of Jerry's rambling garden is never so Arcadian as on an April morning. April in Dunedin, of course, finds Ceres seated on her granary floor. After three years in the Antipodes it no longer seems strange to me to be working up harvest anthems as soon as Easter has passed.

I had given instructions overnight to M'Curdy to be prepared for the arrival of the famous packing-case. M'Curdy who had seen me safely on my way from London to New Zealand, who had established me in the cottage my brother had begged me to come out and occupy, who took a

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far greater pride in my little home than I did myself, received the news of the impending arrival of my household gods with tempered enthusiasm.

“There’s no too muckle room for what-nots and occasionals in this wee hoose,” he had said, “but there, you’ll be aye pleased to have your gear about you. I’ll be ready wi’ the meat chopper the morn to open yon case.”

To Brian the news had been fraught with endless possibilities of delight. I suspected him of the intention to form himself into a queue in the small hours outside my gate. Certain it was that on the portentous morning he slipped into my bedroom in the wake of M’Curdy when that functionary entered with a cup of tea. A fine morning, freedom from school and the prospect of a packing-case filled with the intimate possessions of an interesting uncle, to be brought one by one to view, surely here were ingredients for a cup of happiness. He came in so noiselessly on his sandalled feet that I was unaware of his presence till M’Curdy gave tongue. My batman, as he still likes to style himself, usually exercises a classic restraint in the matter



## THE COMING OF THE PACKING-CASE

of Brian. The shorter catechist in him prompts him to a sombre view concerning a small boy's chances of salvation. He professes to tolerate him for my sake. On that morning, however, an outraged sense of decorum wrung from him an ejaculation—I will not say an oath, for I have not the Lowland idiom.

“What's the matter, M'Curdy?” I asked.

“It's that young Fenian, sir. Do you allow bits o' laddies all over your hoose nicht and day?”

I heard Brian giggle, and shooting out my arm enclosed a handful of flannel shirt.

“Apologise!” I commanded sternly as I held my nephew in chancery.

“'Pologise,” said Brian, and I released him. Then, as he regained his freedom, “It hasn't come yet, Uncle Dick. Supposing the lorry stuck on the hill?”

“What hasn't come?” I demanded.

“The packing-case.”

“Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. Of course it hasn't come. Do you suppose the forwarding agents have been up all night over it?”

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"They'll no' be such early birds as you," said M'Curdy.

"It's a quarter past eight," said Brian. "Dad had to catch the train, and Mum let me have breakfast with him. When do you think it will come?"

"Anywhere between now and bedtime," I said. "You can stay and talk to me now that you are here. May he, M'Curdy? He apologised, you know."

"Very good, sir. The likes of him would wangle the sugar out of your tea. You'd best put on your brown tweeds the morn."

"Do you know, Brian," I said when M'Curdy had left us, "it seems a funny thing to say, but I'm just the teeniest bit afraid of that packing-case."

Brian left off fiddling with my auto-strop.

"How afraid, Uncle Dick?" he asked.

"Well, you see," I said, as I handed him my cup, "it's nearly six years since it was stowed away in the Tottenham Court Road. It's a long time and I've changed a good deal. There are a number of old friends packed away there, and it's a little

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sad, sometimes, meeting old friends when things have changed so."

Brian was silent. I felt I had started up a covey of troubled thoughts in his eyes. He has inherited his mother's manner of speech, but in appearance they tell me he is very like a miniature I possess of Jerry at the age of ten—Jerry, that staid little dreamer whom it was such a temptation to hoax and mystify because of that quality of candour and vulnerability in his expression. I suppose I had hardly realised that I was not talking to myself, nor had I realised how much store Brian had set upon the coming of my argosy.

"But, Uncle Dick——," he faltered at last, and the half-formed thought never found expression. I think it was then I understood what an almost uncanny gift of tact is granted to certain folk, a gift that has nothing to do with age or experience. Brian had never let me feel till now to what extent he had been exercised by the phenomenon of my handicap. I had always liked to have him about me because a small hand is often so much more slick than a large one, and because

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he was always so preoccupied with pleasant little affairs that had to do either with the life in his father's garden or the business of make-believe. I had always thought of him as regarding me as an eccentric piece of mechanism, liable to break or be broken. It was bracing for me to think like that of him. With Jerry and Moira one cannot help sensing at times that vicarious distress which always multiplies my plight by two. Brian had shown me for the first time that my blindness hurt him. It was not simply excitement for himself that he hoped for from the packing-case, but succour and reassurance for me. I was to live up to the blind man's Credo—nothing is different, nothing lost.

"I've been talking nonsense, Brian," I said. "Of course I'm dying to have my pictures on the wall, and my Toby Jug on the mantelpiece, and Lord knows what else."

"And the two horses," Brian prompted.

"Lord, yes, Arabs in bronze. When did I tell you about them?"

"And the boy's head," Brian added, and I could feel that his eyes were clear again.

## THE COMING OF THE PACKING-CASE

“ The infant John Baptist,” I said. “ There’s a chip off his right ear.”

“ Yes. The singing lady did that.”

“ When did I tell you about her ? ”

“ Oh, often, Uncle Dick. She shot at it.”

“ With my revolver. Didn’t know it was loaded. What else have I told you about my rooms ? ”

“ They were in Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes lived.”

“ They were. Oh, Brian, it was jolly there ! Sometimes on a summer night when I’d got my stuff to press I’d sit by the open window and listen to London. When the London symphony comes to Dunedin I’ll take you to hear it. Bother the beastly war ! But then if it hadn’t been for the war I might not have met you, so I suppose it’s rude of me to bother the war. Now you cut along and see if you can spot the lorry coming up the hill. I’m going to get dressed.”

I would not have it supposed that I had managed to cram into that one sarcophagus my entire array of worldly goods when my London home was broken up. Much litter had gone off to a second-

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hand dealer, and some of my most admired trophies found their way to the houses of friends. The chattels to be exhumed from the packing-case, which in due course was dumped at my door, represented something rather more spiritual than cash value. Sentiment had dictated their selection. I realized that morning as M'Curdy brought object after object to the sunlight, how intensely we mortals live, how the inanimate accoutrements and playthings that have been our companions seem to exhale the essence of days that have been lived, and often, to all seeming, forgotten. "Whole lives lie hidden in a bell's tone," someone has written. Great chunks of that conglomerate of days and nights man calls his life, seemed to come to my touch as there were placed in my hands such of my possessions as I had deemed worthy of storage.

M'Curdy stood at the tomb's mouth, conducting the details of exhumation to the accompaniment of flapping zinc foil and swishing straw. Brian received each relic from his hands and conveyed it to me. Then came the thrill of identification.

## THE COMING OF THE PACKING-CASE

In the case of books and pictures his brown eyes were requisitioned. A single word spelt out on cover or fly-leaf "put me wise" as to the books, but with the pictures it was not so simple. Brian was not a Walter Pater with a stock of apt and nervous English prose at his command. He would probably have described the Monna Lisa as "a middle-aged lady in an old-fashioned dress standing by the sea." However, the last thing I required was a personally-conducted tour through my own little picture gallery. When Brian told me I held in my hand a representation of the devil walking downstairs, I did not take long to figure it out that he had handed me poor little René Duval's charcoal sketch of Beerbohm Tree as Malvolio. I am not engaged upon an inventory but a romance, so I will pass on to item 136 or thereabouts, the foundation stone, I suppose, of the entire fabric of this work.

"Aweel," I heard M'Curdy say, with the sigh of a man who straightens his back, "I should be saying we've come to the end of the lucky dip. Here you are, laddie. I dinna ken what's inside

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this, but I mind when I was a wee bit of a bairn like yourself I had a tin like that. I had it fu' up wi' bits of seaweed and bullets I picked up fra' the rifle butts."

"What is it, Brian?" I asked.

"It's a little red box," replied my nephew.

"A red box. I don't remember any red box."

"Red tin," said Brian as he handed me item 136 or thereabouts. I fumbled at the cover of the dented and scratched receptacle he had given me.

"What can it be?" I asked myself, and my question was not immediately answered on effecting an opening. There appeared to be nothing inside at first. Then my fingers encountered a few brittle flakes of tobacco. At their talisman touch the tin at once became significant. Nothing that had emerged from the packing-case beset me with so strong a nostalgia as did that tin when once apprehended. I had not, as a casual reader of this script might suppose, come upon the name of a cherished smoking mixture expunged from memory through shell-shock. Tobacco had not



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been the first sustaining product to fill this casket. I wonder if you can still buy Lane and Hartley's Reinforced Ration in one pound tins ! Times change, and it is not every patent food that achieves immortality. Nowadays you may enquire in vain of your purveyor for those squat little chests of vermilion-lacquered tin, you may look in vain on the hoardings for that poster which acclaimed the vitalising and sustaining qualities of Messrs. Lane and Hartley's preparation. Observant persons who have survived the shocks of the last twenty years will remember that poster as they remember the contours of a hansom cab or the disarming grimaces of the late Dan Leno. It belonged to the days when Mr. John Hassall was first leading the van in the revolt against the Victorian oleograph. Let me recall its details to the mind's eye.

A boy in a white sleeping-suit is holding back a vermilion curtain disclosing an expanse of blue sea. In the middle distance there rides a full-rigged ship of antique build. The sun has lately risen, a burnished half disc on the horizon. Across the empyrean is spread the legend in letters of

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gold, of a colour with the sun and the boy's shock of hair. "Fit yourself for life's great adventure," it runs. In his disengaged hand the boy holds a white banner bearing the inscription in letters of red to match the lacquer of the one-pound tin, "Lane and Hartley's Reinforced Ration."

There is the poster. Now let me write of my first encounter with it. Hilaire Belloc has written somewhere of an eastern potentate who had all things at his command and numbered on a tablet the happy days that he had spent. In the end, I think, they amounted to seventeen. If I were called upon to reverse the cinema spool of my own career in search of my *dies mirabiles* I should cry "stop" on reaching a certain day nearly thirty years back. Superficially it was a day of neutral tints and small dull happenings. It opened with rain, but in the afternoon the sun began to feel his way through the thick banks of cloud so that the sky which had been almost pewter was changed to pearl-grey, suffused with a tint of gold. An unusual stillness seemed to have fallen upon the shabby street down which I dawdled homeward

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from my dame school, turning a segment of butter-scotch on my tongue, and hauling ever and anon at a recalcitrant stocking. (Like Brian I never could keep a pair of garters for more than a week.) That late sunlight seemed to soften everything ; there was a certain blandness even about the second-hand furniture and fried-fish shops. I had to cross a right-of-way which gave access to a wood and coal yard. This was flanked by an advertisement hoarding, and it was there that I first encountered Messrs. Lane and Hartley's poster. I was brought up standing, amid the coal dust and rain puddles, by something that was akin to a vision. There was that in the crude chromolithograph which awakened a genuine spiritual response in me. By some happy fluke the artist, whoever he was, had succeeded in expressing for me what no word or picture had done before. I suppose it was an effect of poise, a happy concordance of head and shoulder. I was quite sure that with the help of that ship and in the light of that glad morning the boy was going to accomplish something better than anything one could read

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of in Tennyson or Kingsley, something less solemn than the finding of the Grail, something more jolly and intimate. He had been roused from sleep, and the reality was better than any dream. I did not want to see his eyes. The eager profile expressed so perfectly that blend of joy and reverence with which he met the day and the adventure.

There was trouble about a music lesson for which I was twenty minutes late by the time I reached home. In my bemused state I found no terrors in parental wrath. My vision remained with me. The boy in the sleeping-suit had focussed my powers of idealisation. I was young enough to believe that attainment of certain graces and the elimination of all unseemliness in ourselves is only a matter of effort. It would be difficult to grow into the stature of that boy, but it would not be impossible. Day by day I refreshed my flagging spirits with the sight of him, until I discovered how I might be conscious of his presence under my very pillow. The poster was reproduced in miniature on the lid of the one pound tins which

## THE COMING OF THE PACKING-CASE

Messrs. Lane and Hartley offered to the public. I saved my pennies, and before many weeks were out I was possessed of the potent aliment, compounded so lavishly of rich essence, so the wrapper informed me, that with its aid the invalid would cease repining, the athlete would win fresh laurels, the jaded clerk and worn housewife would renew their youth.

It was not the rich essences, however, that I looked to for help and strengthening of life's fibres, but the sight of the boy on the box. I kept him in a worn-out Gladstone bag that my father had handed on to me when he noted my love of collecting impedimenta. I would take him from his place whenever I felt in need of encouragement or consolation. It did not occur to me, at first, to partake of the ration. It seemed well to keep my boy undisturbed, as it were, upon his shining lacquered pedestal.

Came a day, however, when I grew lonely in my idolatry, and I let Jerry into my secret. From then onwards the first fine simplicity of my conception suffered a gradual tarnishment. The

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boy on the box became the nucleus of a cult. On Sunday afternoons my brother and I met on the roof of the coach-house and invoked his spirit. We called him "Hartilane the Splendid," and all our reading and powers of invention were brought under contribution to provide heroic acts wherewith to light up the saga of his days.

What of the original contents of the red box? That is rather a sad story. It occurred to me that our Sunday seances would be brought to a suitable close by the reverent consuming of a thimbleful apiece of the ration. The tin was opened accordingly and we partook decorously. But, alas! Jerry, as is sometimes the case with the imperfectly initiated, was guilty of an appalling lapse. He was not an unusually greedy little boy, but the ration, as the wrapper hastened to assure you, was not only nutritious to a degree hitherto unheard of in patent foods, but was also highly palatable. The affinity between the ration and his palate became an overmastering obsession. When he had recovered his better self he came to me with the empty tin in his hand. The red shame surged

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up through his olive skin. Moira says she always wants to laugh when Brian looks like that. I did not laugh at Jerry on that occasion. Perhaps I, too, was imperfectly initiated. The boy on the box would have laughed.

Well, that brought the Hartilane Saga to a close. I put the tin back in the Gladstone bag, and there it remained, the symbol of a vision that grew fainter in the light of common day.

The urgencies of life crowded in on me. It went with me to school, where it accommodated part of a miniature printing press. The boy on the lid, though relegated to the position of a mascot, still had a place in my life. At Cambridge the box did duty as an integral part of a card-index system, and when I set up as journalist and musical critic it found its way, with my other effects, to Baker Street. There it found house room as a receptacle for surplus supplies of tobacco.

It occupied an honoured place I made for it by removing the "innards" of a Dutch clock someone had looted in the Boer War. Being a patriotic clock, I suppose, it had always refused

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to go. Then came the War, and in a whimsical moment I put it in the packing-case along with the other things I wished to keep. Now, after following me across two oceans, it lay opened in my hand, while the son of the small boy who had eaten so barbarously of its contents peered down at it over my shoulder.

"Put it on my mantelpiece, Brian," I said. "It's my tobacco treasury—greatly valued."

Brian laughed tentatively. It was clear that the tin was to him as the primrose to Wordsworth's waggoner, but he would not have me think so.

"Well, here's something I really haven't told you about, it appears," I said. "Put it on my mantelpiece, and some day, maybe——"

"This evening," said Brian, "when I've done my beastly map. Tell me this evening, Uncle Dick."

"We'll see," I replied. "Now we'll leave M'Curdy in his glory to tidy up the mess. You can take me over to the Church. The Vicar wants Woodward to-morrow instead of Stainer."

I have never told Brian the true history of the boy on the box. I am telling it to him for the first time now.



## CHAPTER III

### SOME TALK OF AN ISLAND

Oh, yet a little while may I behold in thee what I was once.

W. Wordsworth.

**I**T was on a Thursday evening after the boys' choir practice that there occurred to me the idea of giving the boy on the box another run. Brian, who possessed a still small voice, joined up with my mob of songsters about six months ago. In return for instruction in musical notation and voice production he used to steer me home at half-past eight, and there was an unwritten pact that he should remain with me till half-past nine. Sometimes he assisted M'Curdy with a brew of cocoa, or if my batman chanced to be foregathering with brither Scots at the Oddfellows' Hall, Brian prepared refreshment on his own account. I enjoyed this time of relaxation as Longfellow did his children's hour, and never marred the occasion

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by asserting my independence. I allowed my nephew to flow over me with his attentions. His light touch never irked, and it pleased him so to be busybodying about the place. When he had cleared away the cups and filled my pipe there was space left for dominoes, the newspaper, or philosophic discussion, according as the spirit moved us. I hesitated in my mind that evening as I heard Brian prize open the red box in order to fill me a corn-cob. One does not come easily by the confidence of a little boy. My half-formed notion of rolling back the years and putting Brian in Jerry's vacated place had its dangers. There was a chance of my failing to recapture the first careless rapture of invention. I might embarrass both myself and Brian in the attempt. It was he who gave me the lead.

"Why did you keep it all that time, Uncle Dick?" he asked.

"Keep what?" I inquired *pro formâ*.

"The red tin."

"Well, I suppose it took my fancy when I was young. M'Curdy had one, too, you know, when

## SOME TALK OF AN ISLAND

he was a bit of a bairn. Rather a coincidence, that."

"What's a coincidence?"

"Things happening together in a funny way make a coincidence. Do you like the picture on the lid, Brian?"

My nephew was silent for a space.

"What's he going to do?" he said at last.

"Who? The boy on the box? Well, that's a question with a hundred answers. What do you think he's going to do, Brian?"

"I dunno."

"Looks as if he's going to get there somehow, don't you think?"

"Get where?"

"Well, there's something which people call 'getting there' which isn't easy to explain. I sometimes feel I've 'got there' when I'm playing Bach on the organ. It's a nice feeling. Christopher Columbus certainly felt he'd 'got there' when he discovered America. What do you think he's after, Brian?"

"I think——" my nephew began, and then

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treated me to one of his characteristic pauses. Those are occasions when I have to visualise that miniature of Jerry for all I am worth. How much of Jerry is there really, I wonder? How much is there of Moira? She is a Wexford woman. I remember her as a bride. I can recall the impression of her eyes—they were a very dark brown. Something seemed to be slumbering in them that had never been wakened. Shirley said she looked stupid, I should have said she looked fey.

“ Well, what do you think, your Riverence? ” I demanded at last.

“ I think he will sail away to an island,” said Brian.

“ An island, yes,” I said. “ I think it must be an island he’s after. He won’t be the first who’s dreamed of an island. What kind of an island would you be after calling it? ”

“ I don’t quite know—not yet, but I think——”

But here Moira rapped at my door, and the big thought was still-born.

It appeared that Brian had overstayed his time by ten minutes.

## SOME TALK OF AN ISLAND

“Have you no idea of time at all, you funny boy?” she demanded. “I believe he’d never go to bed in the night and never get up in the morning if I left him to himself, Dick.”

“It’s my fault,” I said. “I’ve been asking him about an island. Ask your mother what she thinks about it, Brian.”

“Well, ask me when you’re in bed, for the love of goodness,” said Moira, and she bore him off. I do not know if Moira and Brian went into the matter of the island before she kissed him good-night. He may have had some tips from her.

It was not Moira, but the man in Harris tweeds who put us into the way of that central idea round which we subsequently marshalled the details of our romance.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing.  
H. W. Longfellow.

BRIAN will forgive me if I mention the circumstances under which we encountered the man in Harris tweeds. When one has come of age I do not suppose it will distress one to be reminded that at the age of eleven one played at trains. I played at trains with Brian, and I was forty-seven. Our engine was a broken-down reaper and binder that, for some obscure reason, was housed in a shed which stood at the end of a paddock adjoining Jerry's property. The place thereof knows it no more to-day, for two bungalows stand in the room of those tall eucalyptus trees whose branches waved above the corrugated roof of the lean-to. The spot for me used to be fraught with a strange blend of sweetness and pain. In those early days

## THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

when I found my rôle of blind church organist at times almost insupportable, Moira, divining the depths in which I was floundering, used sometimes to hand Brian over to me for an hour or two. Shirley's charge of stupidity is clearly absurd. She was a wise woman that sized up our respective powers of keeping each other out of mischief.

Brian had scarcely emerged from the period of socks and holland tunics when we first met, but there never was a time when he irked or non-plussed me as most children certainly would have done. When we played at trains he seemed to exact from me just as much attention as I needed to give. There was enough and to spare for the healing sun, the pleasant scrape of the gum tree branches overhead, the passing jog and rattle of a tradesman's cart, and all the reassuring, homely little noises of the quiet suburb. These without Brian and our engine would not have been enough to keep the hobgoblins at bay. So I fiddled about with the rusty levers and cranks, and stored up reserves of strength for the fight against odds. I am happy to think that when Brian stole furtively

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

back to the childish things he had put away, there was no one but me whom he would have trusted to play the game in more senses of the phrase than one.

So it came about that on a Saturday morning soon after that which had seen the arrival of the packing-case, Brian and I were caught red-handed, so to speak, at our foolishness by the man in Harris tweeds. We were engaged upon bringing the Cornish express along the last stage of her journey, Brian stoking coal that was not only smokeless, but invisible in every other respect, I alert at my post on the footplate. Exeter was well behind us, and both driver and fireman were entertaining visions of home, wifely welcome, purring kettle, and clambering children. O'Dowd, the stoker, was an enthusiastic family man. It was this that kept his socialist tendencies in check. Both he and Johnson, the driver, held strong views on the subject of the idle rich. O'Dowd was giving throaty expression to his opinions in the intervals from stoking, and Johnson assenting to them with a fearsome drawl, when an interruption occurred



## THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

with the immediate result that a shamefaced Brian and an embarrassed blind man replaced O'Dowd and Johnson. The interruption was caused by the sound of a voice, the kind of voice one associates with the steps of a Piccadilly club, oddly out of place by a fence at the back of beyond.

“ Pardon me, is this the way to the golf links ? ”

I felt as if our little shallop of make-believe had been suddenly rammed by a thoroughly efficient destroyer. A perfectly unreasonable resentment towards that voice threatened to overmaster me. I felt that I was not looking my best. The fellow probably took me for a Hyde Park orator deported overseas for some offence against the realm.

“ Sorry if I interrupted you,” the voice went on with a slight inflexion of pique at my tongue-tiedness. There was an easy insolence underlying the words that goaded me to unconsidered speech.

“ Not at all,” I replied. “ I’ve no doubt you’ve enjoyed my harangue. Human nature hasn’t changed much since Samson made sport for the Philistines. I was merely trying to amuse the little boy.”

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

I heard someone vault the hurdle that divided us, and the next moment I felt a hand on my shoulder and smelt Harris tweeds.

“ I appear to have butted in rather badly,” said the voice. “ I’m so awfully sorry. People often wear dark glasses, you know. I didn’t tumble to it that you, that you—er——”

“ There’s no need for you to apologise,” I replied, with dignity. “ I should not have been acting the mountebank so near a public thoroughfare. I was trying to amuse the little boy.”

“ You were succeeding,” replied the Harris tweeds. “ I’ve never seen a kiddy so wrapped up in a game before.”

At those words my resentment vanished away.

“ You were asking for the golf-links,” I said. “ It is really up to me to beg pardon. You caught me at a disadvantage and I was rattled.”

Harris tweeds gave my elbow an almost imperceptible squeeze.

“ On the contrary, I broke in upon an idyll like a cloven-footed beast. Will you allow me to say how tremendously I admire you ? ”

## THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

I was quite unprepared for this broadside. It was more embarrassing than the original interruption.

“ Brian and I will put you on the road to the golf links,” I said. “ This is my nephew.”

“ Pleased to meet you, as they say in the States,” said the man. “ How very appropriately you have been christened, Mr. Brian. It’s a veritable gossoon you are, with those brown eyes. It’s a pilgrim you are from the island of saints.”

It was Brian’s turn to be tongue-tied. The communicative stranger turned to me.

“ Your nephew,” he said, “ reminds me of that song of Arthur Loft’s called ‘ Puck off his guard.’ How does the second verse go ?

‘ Puck forgot he was old,  
Puck forgot he was wise,  
Just for a crotchet, or maybe a minim,  
Lost all the malice and fun that was in him.  
Longings and fears untold  
Welled in his nut-brown eyes.  
Puck forgot he was old,  
Puck forgot he was wise.’

Do you happen to know it ? ”

I happened to know that particular song very well. To hear it trolled out in a rich baritone as

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

I stood there in the shade of the blue gums, thousands of miles away from the Surrey cottage where it had been composed, was yet something further in the way of a broadside from this strange man.

“ I rather think I do ! ” I replied to his question. “ Loft played it to me when it was still in manuscript.”

“ You know Arthur Loft ? ” said the man in Harris tweeds. “ Well, it’s a small world they say—but all the same it’s damned odd that you should know someone that I know, seeing that I know nobody in this trim little town save my colleagues and that furious solicitor chap who is waiting for me at the golf links. He hates to be kept waiting. I’m such a donkey about finding my way. Barraclough gave me directions, but Barraclough is a tenor, and you know what tenors are.”

“ By Jove ! ” I said, “ you must belong to Olga Patruscha’s concert party.”

“ I do,” came the reply. “ I may say that without me the divine Olga would never have ventured into these furrin parts.”

## THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

“Do you know,” I said, “it’s gradually dawning on me you are John Somerset. I ought to have recognised your voice. I’ve heard you often enough at the Bechstein Hall.”

“Wigmore, if you please,” he answered. “It got naturalised, you remember. I hope you liked my singing.”

“I think you sang a good deal of rubbish,” I replied, “but I praised you when you deserved it. Do you remember Lynx of the *Night Watchman*?”

“Lynx, the critic? Good God! you don’t mean to tell me you are R. W. Burnard.”

“I was,” I said, and regretted the theatricality of my answer as soon as I had spoken.

John Somerset needed no encouragement to work himself into a mood appropriate to a ballad concert. He gripped my arm. One could almost feel he was waiting for the sobbing arpeggios of the accompaniment.

“My dear chap,” he said, “I’m awfully sorry.”

“I play an organ nowadays,” I went on. “Not in the street you know. I play it in Church. I live near my brother. We’ll walk some way with

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

you and make sure you are right for the golf links. Perhaps we will find there is someone else we both know."

"How ripping of you!" said Somerset. "Come along, little chap. Shall I take an arm or leave you entirely to him?"

By the time we found ourselves upon the road John Somerset and I had got each other into better focus. There were so many things to talk of, and talking with him was a passion. He was horribly homesick for London. There were so many things, he said, that I helped him to remember, from the tones of Kreisler's fiddle to the lingering tints in the summer sky as one emerged from the Queen's Hall after a concert. We kept on remembering things till the golf links were reached. There we left him with a promise that he would cut his game as short as possible and come to Jerry's to tea. Brian posted himself by the old engine to await his return and conduct him the rest of the way to Jerry's house. Moira produced a five-o'clock-tea atmosphere to which John Somerset responded as an opening flower to the sun. Jerry came back

## THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

from his office in time to hear two songs and at least half a dozen aphorisms. It was emphatically one of John Somerset's good days. At six o'clock he rose to go.

"I don't know when I've spent such a really happy time," he said. "I used to think I could never be happy until I had an island all to myself where a lot of things had to be put straight and I was the fellow to do it, but now I know what I want. I want a wallpaper like this, and a bit of fire in a well grate like that, and a wife and a little boy just like yours, sir, and I want it to be always tea time."

With that he paid his respects, and took himself off.

I had my choir practice that evening, so I could not go to the first of Olga's performances. Brian came back with me to await the return of his father and mother from the concert. He was sleepy after a rather exciting day, and happy in the knowledge that he was in the midst of his term holidays. He filled my pipe from the tin box, and curled himself up in my spare arm-chair.

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“ Well,” I said, “ have you thought about the boy on the box ? ”

“ Oh, yes. I think it would be nice to call him Christopher.”

“ Excellent. Now, about that island——”

Brian chuckled.

“ It’s funny the man had an island too ! ” he said.

“ What man ? Oh, you mean old Harris tweeds. Yes, that was very rum, wasn’t it ? An island where they want a man to put things straight. That’s what Christopher is after.”

So it was that we began the first session of our parliament. What I record hereafter, with interludes that may help Brian to recollect himself when he is twenty-one, is the story of a search, a struggle, and a conquest. The passages of fine writing and any stray moralising must be attributed to me. The invention is, for the most part, Brian’s. I have already made my acknowledgments to John Somerset for his suggestion as to the nature of Christopher’s quest.



## CHAPTER V

### THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

For I have seen,  
Pointing its shapely shadows from the dawn,  
An image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,  
A drowsy ship of some yet older day.

James Elroy Flecker.

**B**RIAN'S BAY is somewhere on the east coast of England. I do not wish to be more specific for very good reasons. You could hardly call the little place a seaside resort, for, as far as I know, it has been resorted to only by Christopher's father, his aunt Mabel, and his brother and sister, Derek and Topsy respectively. There are fisher-folk dwelling at Brian's Bay, simple, kindly souls, who put out in smacks with orange sails, and come back with a cheery word for the women-folk whatever their luck has been. In short, they model themselves upon the pattern set out on the cover of Brian's Chatterbox.

I remember the cheery mariner well, for the

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Chatterbox is an heirloom. At Brian's Bay no one ever got drunk. It is true that old Simon Whitsuntide was partial to a glass in the sanded parlour of "The Sea Boots," but the old man never exceeded, and the young men respected and emulated his restraint.

At Brian's Bay there was a jetty where the fishing boats might tie up. To the right of this there was a strip of white beach. Here there was ample room for a game of cricket. Christopher was very cunning at carving cricket balls from sea kelp, and Derek, his elder by some three summers, had shaped several very passable bats from driftwood. Our hero, it need hardly be said, had something about him that differentiated him from other boys. It would be difficult to say what this something was. At school he was neither prodigy nor dunce. He had never betrayed any tendency to run away, to thrash the school bully, or become a film star. His place in class was eight from the top and nine from the bottom. Derek, on the other hand, showed an aptitude for study which augured well for his success in one of the gentlemanly

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professions. Derek was dark and slim and freckled. Christopher, of course, was fair. Perhaps Aunt Mabel sized them up truly when she said, "Derek is his father over again. He is a Lane to his toe-caps. He looks like a Lane, he eats like a Lane, and he argues like a Lane. Christopher favours his poor mother. He's a Hartley and there's a streak of something in those Hartleys. Look at their men-folk, splendid failures to a man, almost. Likeable, I grant you, but whoever heard of a Hartley cutting up well at the end. I tell you quite frankly Christopher floors me at times." She was, of course, speaking metaphorically, for Miss Lane was partial to a forcible trope at times. Christopher would no more have dreamed of levelling his aunt to the floor than of up-ending the Archbishop of Canterbury. He really loved his Aunt Mabel, though she had a sharp tongue. He would take a beating from her in very good part. People who did not understand Christopher said that he sulked after a beating. This was not the case. When they thought he was sulking, Christopher was really communing with himself.

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People did not know, of course, that he was a child of destiny : he hardly knew it himself until that morning when he saw the ship. This brings us back to Brian's Bay.

At Brian's Bay there was a single cobbled street which ran down to the pier where one heard the seagulls and kestrels most of the day through. " The Sea Boots " was situated in this street, and opposite that hostelry stood Sea View Cottage where dwelt Miss Judith Whitsuntide for the greater part of the year. For the month of August she always went to stay with a second cousin at Barnstaple, and that is where Christopher, Derek, Topsy and Aunt Mabel came in, or perhaps I should say, when they came in. Mr. Lane was a very busy man as he had to have his finger constantly on the pulse of the British public. This does not mean that he was a medical man. He was politician and publicist which, of course, meant that he could never stay in one place for more than two days at a time. Thus it was that upon his sister fell the onus of shepherding his motherless family to the seaside.

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Derek and Topsy thought that Brian's Bay was jolly. It was jolly to sleep in a strange bed, jolly to eat food that tasted strangely out of unaccustomed dishes and vessels, jolly to romp on the sand and bathe in the sea and never to worry about stockings or lessons. To Christopher, Brian's Bay was something more than jolly. He always remembered how his heart had seemed to leap as the fly from "The Sea Boots" rounded the corner and he saw the sea like a blue strip of carpet at the end of the cobbled hill. The houses on either side narrowed his view for the moment, but it was enough to see an oblong of it shining out there beyond the jetty. That was only, as it were, the introduction to his love. He had a hundred and one beautiful secrets to learn of Brian's Bay, and they all seemed to lead up to the greatest secret of all, the secret of the wooden ship.

He learned a thing of Brian's Bay when he was sent in his turn with the tin pail across the pastures to the farm for the evening supply of milk. The little place was haunted. He had a choice of two ways to the farm, and it was when he took the lower

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track that ran up from the sand hills that he came upon the spirit of Brian's Bay. Just where the sand and marram grass made way to the pasture a girl was kneeling by the side of the track. She was dressed in a frock of some grey material, and her back was towards Christopher as he emerged upon the open space. Involuntarily he paused. She was so still and the whole world about her so quiet that it seemed fitting for him to stay in his stride. Nothing moved in the pasture, for the cows had not yet been turned out from the byre, and the birds were all in the shelter of the spruces that made a straight dark line across the acres of swelling green. As Christopher paused the girl rose and came walking towards him. He could see that her hair was dark and abundant and plaited into two braids. She wore a white coif and fichu and a dainty white apron. In her hand she carried a commodious looking bag of some patterned material. She walked right past Christopher without any indication that she had seen him. Her grey eyes were wide open, her lips parted. So she went by him, and disappeared round

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a hillock of sand. Christopher continued on his way until he came to the spot where she had knelt. There he found a cluster of little blue flowers. Christopher had never seen so delicate a shade as that of the fragile petals. Each flower had an eye of gold.

“ They are like little suns rising in little skies,” he thought. “ No wonder she knelt over them and came away with such a consolation. I wonder who she was ? ”

He had word of her shortly afterwards from old Simon Whitsuntide. It seemed that some years ago an artist had dwelt at Brian’s Bay. With him was a housekeeper and his little daughter, for he was a widower. This child came to be known at Brian’s Bay as “ the little grey mother ” because of the delight she took in the four-and-twenty babies of the place. Often she would sail with her father in his four-ton sloop, for the artist delighted both to sail on the sea and to make pictures of it in all its moods. They went away from Brian’s Bay. Later they were known to be passengers on a ship that was wrecked on a passage to the

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Canary Islands. Their names were not in the list of survivors, but the people of Brian's Bay would have it that the little grey mother still lived.

"They do say," old Simon concluded, "that she do walk by the pasture, and she's decked out as she was when her daddy painted her picture. They do say that her heart is set upon Brian's Bay where she was so happy. Maybe she's wanting a peep at them babies she was so daft about. 'Little grey mother,' they called her here. She was for ever motherin' and tidyin'."

Christopher listened, and kept his counsel.

"I should like to help her," he thought.

He went about the business of play with this preoccupation in his mind. He joined in at cricket and rounders with Derek and Topsy and the little Ponsonbys, children from the Rectory, but he would catch himself comparing the cornflower blue of Topsy's smock with the blue of those delicate petals by the track-side, when he should have been aiming the ball deftly at her nimble figure as she made for the home base. Topsy belied her name, for she was as fair as little Eva,



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and though she could not remember her mother she was quite sure she had had one.

Then there came that morning when the thought of the little grey mother was driven from Christopher's mind by the first sight of the wooden ship.

It was the morning to be remembered by all at Sea View Cottage, save Christopher for another reason. It was the morning on which Aunt Mabel overslept herself. She had never done such a thing before, and has never since. Derek and Topsy and Monica overslept also, but there is nothing very remarkable about that. Only Christopher awakened before eight o'clock, and upon the manner of his waking depends our story. Out at sea someone blew upon a shell, and Christopher heard, and hearing, opened his eyes. Why he alone should have awakened to the blowing of that conch is not for mortal man to say. The sound of it filled the little dark rafted chamber where he and Derek slept ; such a gentle pulse of music, yet so insistent that it seemed to brim the room with sound so that every nook and cranny responded to it. Yet Derek slept on with his trim little mouth well closed and

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

his sun-tanned ears apparently sealed against that wave of vibrating sweetness. Christopher sat up in bed with eyes and ears wildly awake. Their one little window looked out on the cobbled street. From where he sat he could see the gables of "The Sea Boots." A sparrow was perched upon the telephone insulator and a child's kite of gaudy scarlet was wedged between the woodwork. Nothing there to explain the sound. He slipped out of bed and crept to the door. Outside was a passage which led to a French window overlooking the sea. On summer nights this window was hooked back and its place taken by a red curtain. As Christopher went softly down the passage a cuckoo clock at the foot of the stairs behind him gave eight calls, but no one stirred in the lower regions. The cuckoo's note ceased, and once again there was only that long fluting, louder and clearer now. Christopher reached the end of the passage and, drawing back the curtain, gazed outwards.

Need I write of what he saw? It is all on the lid of the tin box on my mantelpiece. Brian and

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

I had our hero thus placed in position at the end of our first session. The house rose at eleven with the arrival of Brian's parents. I walked up the little path with Moira and Jerry and their sleepy son.

"I think John Somerset was far more wonderful than Olga," said Moira. "He sang 'Because' as an encore."

"He didn't," I cried. "He's hopeless."

"Hopeless? What do you mean? It was topping. Good-night. Are you sorry you begged so hard for Brian to sit up?"

"Certainly not. Once in a way won't hurt him, and he dozed a good deal."

"I never did," protested Brian with a huge yawn.

We said good-night again, and I retraced my steps down that so familiar path. Alone in my cottage I began to think of John Somerset. What was it he had said about coming out from the Queen's Hall of a May evening? Confound the fellow. Why had he such a disturbing way of putting things? London was something to forget.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

I should never sniff the breath of the Piccadilly tube again, or catch a whiff of bitumen where they were renewing the wooden blocks of Oxford Street. Those were two of the things I remember remembering when I went about London for the first time without eyes. They made me think of Shirley. I don't know why. I suppose it was the force of contrast. She did not seem to take on London grime. It passed her by. She could wear one of those deep Peter Pan collars and never show a speck all day. Once she was dressed as a witch. I think of her often in that absurd costume. She was dressed like that when I realised that she might become a great singer. Such thoughts are disturbing. I wished John Somerset had not made me remember that I remembered remembering.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SUMMONS

A boy's will is the wind's will,  
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.  
H. W. Longfellow.

IT would be difficult to say how long Christopher remained by the red curtain. In a sense I suppose he may be said to have waited there since the day the artist limned him for the poster. For our present purpose it is enough to say that he remained there spell-bound until Aunt Mabel broke the spell. She did so by emerging from her room in boudoir cap and kimona like an embodied spirit of work-a-day wisdom at war with all dreaming.

"Good gracious, Christopher child, whatever are you doing there?"

Christopher dropped the curtain.

"I'm just waiting," he answered in perfect truth and sincerity.

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“Waiting? Waiting for what? Do you know the time? It’s nearly eight o’clock.”

“It’s past eight,” said Christopher. “Derek’s still asleep.”

“Why didn’t you wake him?”

“I don’t know. I just heard the singing noise and came out.”

“Singing noise? What do you mean? There must be singing in your head. I’ll have to get your ears seen to when we go back to London. Now go and dress yourself, and let’s have no more nonsense. What can have become of Monica?”

The boudoir cap was popped over the banisters.

“Monica, do you know the time?”

Answer came from Monica the maid-of-all-work below stairs.

“Lor, Mum. I’ve overslep’ meself somethink chronic. I ain’t made me toilet yet. ’Oly Moses!”

The last ejaculation was accompanied by a crash of tinware. Monica had fallen foul of promiscuous trays and buckets.

“Come, come,” said the voice at the head of

## THE SUMMONS

the stairs, " is that the way they teach you to speak at the Girls' Friendly Society ? "

Aunt Mabel, like a good captain, soon had her demoralised command in hand. Derek appeared on the landing buttoning furiously, and Topsy emerged from another door looking like little Eva of the last act in her white nighty. It was absurd to call her Topsy. The sheen of her golden hair, and the china blue of her eyes cried out against such a misnomer.

Breakfast got itself cooked and eaten and the lost minutes were redeemed, but by the time the children were on the sands there was no sign of the wooden ship. A cricket match had been arranged between the Sea View children and the three little Ponsonbys. There existed a mild feud between the two houses. I am afraid that Christopher let his side down rather badly that morning. One can hardly wonder at this, for his thoughts were far away. He was sending his mind across the blue rim of the ocean where the hull of the ship had disappeared. Locked away in his heart was his tremendous secret. He knew

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

that call had come across the water for him. At some time—he knew not when—that ship would define herself again out there across the breakers. Again he would hear the unearthly sweetness of the blown conch, and then he would have to go. Derek's shafts of sarcasm glanced off him unheeded. He could only reply to the taunt of "butter fingers" with an enigmatic smile. Never had Derek appeared to him in so favourable a light. As for Topsy, she seemed like a beautiful shell of the sea, and her eyes had the colour of the little blue flowers in the pasture.

"I suppose it's because I'm going to leave them," Christopher thought to himself. "It's like that with folk you've always taken for granted." It was odd that streak of pain across the happiness that had come with the sight of the ship.

"I wish I could take them, too," he said to himself. "But that's just what I can't do. Visions make one rather lonely."

All that day he joined in whatever was going forward with all the zest he could muster, but his eyes would for ever be searching the horizon for



## THE SUMMONS

sight of the white sails. In the later afternoon he volunteered to go to the farm for the milk, although it was Derek's turn.

"She will not come until the sun is new again," he told himself. Derek was a little abashed at the proposal in the light of what he had said in the morning, but made no demur, for he hated going for the milk. So Christopher went off with the pail swinging in his hand.

"Even my pail makes music," he thought to himself. "I will go by the path where the little blue flowers are to be seen."

Evening closed in as he returned. The three little Ponsonbys had been invited to tea. Christopher was glad of this, for with the coming of dusk there stole upon him a greater sense of the loneliness that goes along with a high destiny. One would not call it a misgiving; one would rather say that he wanted to make sure of his everyday self.

That night, when his head touched the pillow, he wondered if the morrow would bring the summons. It was a moonless night, and he slept

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

soundly. Brian's Bay slept with him. Only the long sea rollers were wakeful. Nobody was aware of a tiny speck of light far out at sea. It was the glow of a lanthorn that swung from the masthead of the wooden ship. It was very quiet on the quarter deck. Two cloaked figures were seated upon one of the chests that lumbered up the deck space in a most unsailor-like fashion. As the smaller of the two raised an arm to emphasise his speech there came the muffled tinkle of little bells.

"To-morrow we put all to the hazard. I can only trust your spy-glass played you true, Prince Lotus."

"I am certain," the other replied. "He came to the glass door not more than three minutes after I blew upon the shell. There was no mistaking. I saw him white against the red curtain. He will come."

The other rose from his seat.

"Come? Aye. But how? We cannot send for him. The pinnacle would not live among such breakers. Moreover, we dare not ask it of our

## THE SUMMONS

men. They have gone through as much as they have stomach for."

"It is a miracle to me that we have brought the *Nautilla* thus far. Who would have thought such inveterate landmen as our people could have furnished out such a ship and manned her with such a crew. Had it not been for you, Sir Luzifuz, we could not have made the venture."

"And I'm no mariner by choice I do assure you," added the smaller speaker. "Gladly will I hand this English boy my command if he will come. Yet how is he to come?"

"He will find a way," replied Prince Lotus. "Remember what the 'little grey mother' told us of the English. They are a wonderful people."

"To-morrow, then. Some hours after sunrise," said Sir Luzifuz. "Now let us put a little further seawards. We must come upon him, as it were, from the edge of the world." With that he blew upon a whistle, and voices came out of the darkness in answer.

When Christopher awoke at six o'clock he slipped

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

out of bed and stole to the window. The newly-risen sun sparkled across an empty sea.

“She will not come to-day,” he told himself, but in that he was wrong. The summons came about noon, and took him completely unawares. He was gambolling about among the breakers like a young porpoise in company with Derek. Some yards behind them Topsy was playing at being a mermaid. The dancing breakers, as they spent themselves, made streaks of white against the blue like the irregular pattern on the cover of Christopher’s exercise book. Above them a sea bird screamed. Derek, with his dark fringe plastered with brine across his forehead, leaped and squealed like an imp of the cauldron. Then came that sudden hush when one exhausted wave has ceased its frothing and seething and the oncomer is just flapping its crest. In that moment’s pause Christopher heard the summons. Shaking the water from his eyes he gazed out to sea. There beyond the ridge of the next wave he caught the glint of white sails.

“The ship! The ship!” he cried. “Good-

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bye, Derek. Good-bye, Topsy. Dearest and best, good-bye."

Then he hurled himself at the toppling wave that was upon him.

## CHAPTER VII

### CLARIBEL ISLAND

All things in common Nature should produce  
Without sweat or endeavour : Treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people.

*The Tempest.*

**W**HILE we leave Christopher to battle his way through the surf to the vast waste of water beyond, and so on to the wooden ship, we must set down some word of that island whence the vessel came. If you were to approach the place from the north you would first be made aware of something darker than the circumambient blue which, as you draw nearer, proves to be the face of a cliff, so shaped as to resemble the tower of some cathedral rising up from a misty plain. It would almost seem that the hand of man had designed those rearing pillars of rock at once so graceful and so massive. The waters dash themselves

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white against the base of this natural monument, and when a sea bird passes across the face of the cliff or emerges from some cranny high up among the rugged pinnacles, one's eyes follow the pallid wings as they describe odd figures against the blue-black of the rock. There is something of the sheen of old armour that has not been allowed to rust about the clefts and buttresses of the great pile. It is a grand but not altogether inviting prospect thus presented, but to the shipwrecked it would hold out some hope of abiding. So it had seemed, at any rate, to a boat-load of parched and weary fugitives on a certain grey and misty day many years ago. There was something grimly picturesque about the tarnished finery with which the men, women and children were decked. Their huddled attitudes did not set off satin doublet and hose or brocaded gown to great advantage. At the bottom of the boat a boy lay moaning softly. His face showed deathly white against a scarlet hood and jerkin, bedizened with little bells that the sea salt had corroded. In the stern sheets sat a dishevelled harlequin nursing on his knees a rusted guitar.

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Such were the pioneers of that settlement which was to grow into the kingdom of Claribel Island. Dazed and listless, bereft of memory, and guided only by some haphazard instinct, they effected a landing. Later came the discovery that the forbidding northern point of the island belied its true character. The sunny eastern coast provided easy sustenance and shelter. The days passed on, and other waifs from the ocean, in a similar plight, found their way to the spot. In every case there was the same bereavement of interest in the life that had gone before. Sometimes one or another would be visited with flashes of memory. Visions would haunt some dreamer in the night of forked lightning across the sky, and mighty waves crashing over wooden decks, but with the sunny mornings would come that overwhelming desire to live in the present calm, to provide for simple needs and to keep on forgetting. All those who found their way to the place had one thing in common—a great horror of the sea. The little boy who had been lifted from the boat as one dead lay for many weeks on a bed of dried moss in one of the huts that were



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quickly fashioned of wattle and daub. He was carefully tended by two of the women who had been in the boat with him, but for a long time it seemed that his would be the first grave to be dug upon the island. In his delirium he would often cry out, and there would be contention among those who stood by whether it were wise, or no, to take heed of what he said.

“We may learn from him tidings of ourselves,” one would say.

“Is it well to know what has been,” another would answer.

Sometimes the lad would break into snatches of song. Often he seemed exercised in his mind concerning some great work of building and beautifying that was going forward.

“How the Queen loves that ruby red,” he would murmur. “She will have it everywhere. Brodilla is the darling of all her artisans, for he can stain glass that way.” Or again, “It is not an easy thing to chisel a lotus from that stone.”

As time went on the fever seemed to burn itself out, and he talked less and less of building and

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planning. There came a morning when he began to notice those who ministered to him. He would finger the material of a nurse's gown, and ask questions concerning the food that was brought him. Later on he betrayed a great desire to creep towards the patch of sunlight at the entrance of the hut where he lay. Day by day his strength returned and he was no longer haunted by memories of a fair city in building.

As had been the case with others on the island, a curtain seemed to fall across the past, but whereas the greater number of the people seemed content that it should be so, such was not the case with the youth. His long delirium had left its mark upon his mind. There was something, he knew, that he had ardently desired. Memory was wiped away, but the desire remained. At last he was deemed fit to take his place in the commonwealth and went out into the new world which had been coming into being all the while he lay on his rough bed, raving of palaces and fountains, gems and coronals, painting pictures and hewing out statues in the fevered mansions of memory and desire.

## CLARIBEL ISLAND

He did not like that world he found beyond the door of the hut. It was a flat, drab world. His fellow-citizens seemed to govern their way of life on the great principle, nothing must be done to disturb their present peace. Effort or enquiry would rend the curtain that had mercifully dropped across the landscape of past days. They knew that a great terror dwelt there, and, since it was permitted them to forget the nature of that dreadful bane, it seemed wise to keep on forgetting. They could sustain life with a very small effort, as the island proved to be far more fertile than might have been supposed from a first view of those cliffs. As the youth went in and out among the folk of the place, he found that all his questions and proposals were met by the same cold and distrustful glances. He was put to simple tasks as his strength returned, and found that his combative, questing spirit was quite without scope.

“ They do not wish me to grow well,” he said to himself. “ If they did they would listen to me and set me worthy tasks.”

In this he did his elders a great injustice. They

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wished him well in every way. It simply happened that there was a difference in the estimate of what was good. I suppose that in time the youth would have capitulated to the superior forces set against him had it not been for his encounter with the Baldareel Buzz.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BALDAREEL BUZZ

Ah, Love ! could thou and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire ! ”

Omar Khayyam.

THE Baldareel Buzz was a familiar of Brian's before I came upon the scene at all. My nephew says he thought of him on the day he cut his knee with the broken sea-kale pot. That was a very long time ago because he did not have proper braces. His mother had bathed his knee, and told him to sit very quietly in the porch with a book of animals. Then she had gone to the drawing-room where she could practise the piano, and keep an eye on him through the window. He had pretended to look at the giraffe, but all the time he was listening to his mother playing something that was happy in one hand and sad in the other. He made up the

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Baldareel Buzz because he did not really like the animals in the book, but he did not want to stop his mother playing. It was something that flew about. It would do things for you, but you had to be careful because it could hurt you. It was a lovely red colour.

Brian and I were tramping along the Port Chalmer's road when he introduced me to his tricky spirit. We rounded several bends, catching and losing the sun at intervals. The cart ruts were only just frozen, and every sound came across the water on our right with a clarity that rejoiced the heart. There was music even in the rattle of the dredge that scooped the uncertain channel by which the ships of more modest draught make their way down the long arm of the harbour. Then there was the "chunk-chunk" of the motor launches, a human note as an offset to the melancholy scream of sea gulls. It was emphatically a morning on which to be alive, and as Brian and I were both playing truant to a greater or less degree, there was a tang to our appetite for enjoyment.

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We stopped awhile to lean upon the wood and wire fence while a train thundered past us on its way to Dunedin. Its noise died away and we were aware again of the thrumming of the telephone wires above us.

“ Did you ever hear of Ariel, Brian ? ” I asked.  
“ He was on an island too, you know.”

“ Oh, yes,” replied my nephew. “ Did that make you think of him ? ”

He picked up a piece of road metal and began a tattoo on the droning post.

“ I suppose it was. I wonder if he sang like that when Prospero shut him up in the oak.”

“ I think the Baldareel Buzz was a bit like Ariel,” said Brian.

“ The how much ? ” I demanded.

Brian introduced me to his familiar. Something in the air must have rendered him communicative that morning, for as a general rule he keeps a rather jealous guard over his flock of whimsies. We continued on our way by the long water front, discussing many things as we went. It is astonishing to find how quickly you can cover the ground with

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a little boy hitched on to your arm, provided he skips from right to left and back again at intervals. It was just as we rounded the last of a series of bends in the road that something occurred which led our talk back to the subject of familiar spirits.

“ Jiminy ! ” said Brian, as we stepped into the sunlight. “ What a whopper.”

“ What’s a whopper ? ” I asked.

“ A big ship,” he replied. “ Union Company.”

“ Red funnel and green hull,” I said. “ She’ll be the what’s-her-name. I never can remember your Maori lingo. Is she very stately, Brian ? ”

For answer my nephew began to croon to himself,

Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.

Then across the water came a long bellow from the ship’s siren, breaking in upon the peace of the morning with a note of impatience and alarm.

“ Hallo,” I said, “ I suppose that’s the kind of noise the Baldareel Buzz makes when he is angry. I think he must have made a noise like that on the island where Christopher went to put things straight.”



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“ What did Christopher have to put straight ? ” demanded my nephew.

“ My dear Brian,” I replied, “ that is just what I was going to ask you.”

We munched our sandwiches on the platform of a tiny station, and caught a train back to town where our neglected tasks awaited us.

When next we forgathered at the sign of the red box, we had tidings to exchange of the Baldareel Buzz. He first appeared to the youth of the jerkin and bells as he was pacing a strip of sandy beach at some distance from the settlement. The convalescent was deeply unhappy, as anyone might have judged by the sombre light of his eyes and the set of his pouting mouth. His spirit was chafing at the monotony and meanness of his days. He thought of the straight rows of hovels, the uneven highways, the primitive lighting and sanitation, the utter lack of desire for better things among the folk with whom he was compelled to dwell. His eyes smarted with tears at the memory of snubs and rebuffs he had received from his elders when he had tried to infect them with some of

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his divine discontent. He felt that his passion for richness of colour and symmetry of form was being slowly starved out of him. He would NOT go on pretending to be content like the others. They were not content, they were afraid. He paced the hot white sand, and his hot salt tears dropped unheeded. If only there was someone or something in whom to confide his great longing to make himself a better world in which to dwell. He brushed away his tears with an impatient gesture, and as he did so his eye was caught by something red that lay on the sand at his feet. At first he thought it was a tiny strand of seaweed, but, as he gazed, it moved, and then he thought it was a butterfly that had been blown from the shelter of the trees. He stooped to examine the forlorn and beautiful thing more closely, his eyes ravished by the richness of the colouring. The winged creature hopped upon his wrist, and there remained.

“ I have never seen so rich a red,” murmured the youth to himself. “ It warms my heart to look upon it.”

“ You have been so starved of colour and

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sympathy of late," replied the creature in a voice that was like the whisper of the wind among the pine needles.

The youth started violently, but the Baldareel Buzz retained his hold upon the slender wrist.

"Have no fear," he went on, "you shall be lonely and sad no longer."

"Who are you?" demanded the youth.

"I am desire on the wing," replied the spirit. "I am discernment embodied. I understand and sympathise, and can give shape to all your dreams. Poor boy, you have been very lonely."

"I have," replied the youth, and two great tears of self-pity rolled down his cheeks.

"There, there," said the Baldareel Buzz, "now tell me all about it. I am here to do your bidding."

"This is very mollifying," thought the youth, and there and then he let loose his pent-up emotions. His people, he said, had chosen to forget the urbane arts and graces which had made their past life seemly and pleasant. They had devised a manner of life which to him was a sorry scheme of things. He wanted order and pageantry, colour and

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romance. They planned for a way of life that was easy, toneless and flat. He was haunted by recollections of generous vistas and noble surroundings. He felt that there were days that should be marked by festivals and ceremonies, that there should be distinction of rank among them, and a striving to excel in the high arts.

The Baldareel Buzz listened sympathetically, and as he listened he grew in size, so that he presently stood poised on the youth's wrist like a falcon. His little jewel-like eyes were luminous with benign comprehension.

"What a vision has been yours," he said. "I have waited for such as you this long while. When is it your wish that we should begin?"

"What do you mean?" asked the youth.

"I can give effect to whatever is in your mind," replied the Baldareel Buzz. "What is your name?"

"They call me Luzifuz."

"Speak your behests, Luzifuz,  
For I am the Baldareel Buzz.

Mine are the treasures of forests and caves,

## THE BALDAREEL BUZZ

Mine to command is an army of slaves,  
Gold, silk, and sandal wood, gems without  
price,  
Belts and gum arabic, pigments and spice,  
Camel hair brushes, adze, gimlet and plane,  
Brass rivets, gold-foil, and rich walnut stain.  
Steadfast cement, conduit pipes without flaw,  
Brace, bit and solder pot, hammer and saw.  
Speak, and I'll turn your fair city of dreams  
Into a city of stonework and beams."

"This is very overwhelming," said Luzifuz,  
"but the rhyming couplets are most reassuring.  
Please name your condition."

"How did you know there was going to be a  
condition?" asked the Baldareel Buzz.

"Oh, there always is a condition," replied the  
youth. "Fairies have their little fads like every-  
body else. You are a fairy, aren't you?"

"I've never gone into the matter," replied the  
Baldareel Buzz. "I hate introspection. But talking  
of conditions, I think it is only fair to say that I do  
expect one thing of you and your people if you  
place yourself in my hands."

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“ What is that ? ” asked Luzifuz.

“ It is quite logical and fair,” replied the spirit.  
“ You wish to bring about an ideal state of things. Very well. I only ask that when the City Beautiful is completed no man or woman shall ever express a desire to leave its precincts in search of something better.”

“ That seems reasonable enough,” replied Luzifuz. “ What can be better than the best ? ”

“ It is a solemn undertaking you give on behalf of your people,” said the Baldareel Buzz.

“ One must take risks if one would see a dream come true,” replied Luzifuz.

“ It’s your dream, remember,” quoth the spirit.  
“ I offer you fulfilment without sweat or pang. I only ask for compliance. Think well. There may be another way of bringing betterment.”

“ What other way ? ” asked Luzifuz.

“ The slow, hard way of the pioneer and the missionary,” replied the spirit.

“ I have preached my gospel of beauty and progress,” replied Luzifuz. “ They will not listen.”

“ They are content,” said the Baldareel Buzz.

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“ There is wisdom in contentment. They think they know what is good for them.”

“ They know nothing,” replied Luzifuz. “ I will show them who is right and who is wrong. Tell me what I must do, I will put all to the hazard. Away with sad sagacity and headshakings upon the vanity of desire. Why should we know longing and hunger if fulfilment be a mockery ? ”

For answer the Baldareel Buzz hopped from the youth's wrist to the sand. Luzifuz saw that now the spirit was in size as a large eagle.

“ Kneel upon my back,” commanded the Baldareel Buzz, “ and clasp your arms about my neck.”

Trembling, but set of will, Luzifuz obeyed. The red wings flapped and whirred, and in another moment the visionary was speeding, mounted on his winged desire, towards fulfilment. It is not for man to say what took place in that cranny among the sharp spires of the northern cliffs whither the Baldareel Buzz flew with his burden. Only the sea gulls knew, and they and Luzifuz are silent upon that matter. We must have

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recourse to the records of the time which set forth how Luzifuz was missed from the settlement for seven days and nights.

On the eighth day he did appear to the no small teen and wonder of his fellow settlers in the midst of a baker's dozen of shaggy anthropoids who fawned upon him as they came, and bore upon their shoulders huge packs. Accompanying them were six beings whose aspect contrasted most vividly with that of the apes. They were small and lissom of figure, and were dressed in loose black clothes. Their faces were an ebon black, their hair abundant and upstanding, and they wore tapering black beards. These strange creatures jabbered to one another in high womanish voices, casting looks towards Luzifuz that were full of a wild kind of amusement. The anthropoids were of giant strength, and of so terrifying aspect that the settlers were sorely put to it, for between fear and curiosity, they were in two minds, those in the rear of the crowd crying "Forward!" and those in front crying "Back!"

Luzifuz led the great apes to a clearing in the



## THE BALDAREEL BUZZ

heart of the settlement. There he was questioned (from a goodly distance) by an elder of the people.

“Men and women with whom I have dwelt,” he made answer, “since you are too fearful of those questions ‘Whence?’ and ‘Whither?’ to set about a search for betterment, you shall be saved from your present unworthy state in spite of yourselves. You shall not be disturbed, but you shall be worthily housed. There awaits my beck and call an army of skilled slaves of like aspect to these, my henchmen. They shall build you a city so fair that all its citizens shall go about their business as if to music, and it shall be named Claribel Town.”

The story of the building of Claribel Town is embodied in a ballad which was sung for the last time on the day before the wooden ship sailed in quest of Christopher. It does not conform to the true ballad measure, so I will only quote such verses as may help on this narrative :

Three moons waxed, and three moons waned,  
And Claribel Town was builded,  
Walls of marble, rosy-veined,  
And bellying domes begilded.

# THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

Nine score slaves with knotty thews  
And quivering forearms wrought her,  
Shaggy-coated, damp with ooze,  
And gritty from dust and mortar.

They had cunning in their hands,  
But laboured in fear like minions,  
One there was who shrieked commands,  
And harried them with red pinions.

When they flagged or gazed abroad  
The little black men would goad them,  
Swooping down like flash of sword  
The Terrible Sprite bestrode them.

Who commanded them to bring  
Their waggons and winches seven?  
Was it not the fierce red thing  
That fluttered all day in heaven?

Cedar wood and flint they brought,  
Heaped rubble and spalls and shingle,  
Tiles and brass work finely wrought,  
And colours to flash and mingle.

Sun shone forth and storm clouds broke.  
And Claribel Town was finished,  
All the while the island folk  
Looked on at the work astonished.

Nine score toilers flicked their tails,  
For joy that the work was ended,  
Hammered home the last nine nails,  
And over the mountains wended.

Thus the people watched them go  
With never a word of pity,  
Waited till the sun was low,  
Then entered the clean still city.

## THE BALDAREEL BUZZ

And there they dwell in right good cheer  
By fountain, and lawn, and meadow,  
Saving this, that once a year  
Red terrible wings cast shadow.

And now having written all that is expedient to write of the origin of the Baldareel Buzz, we must say something of that enigmatic being's influence on the later history of Claribel Town. This will best be done by recording a conversation between Prince Lotus and the Lady Nautilla which took place in a balcony overlooking King Kapok's ballroom on a certain night following one of those annual visits of the jealous spirit.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FORGOTTEN THING

There is always a thing forgotten  
When all the world goes well.

G. K. Chesterton.

LIKE many coloured petals cast upon an eddy, the throng of dancers swayed and turned. In the musicians' gallery an orchestra of strings and wood-wind gave forth the strains of a waltz so compelling in its melody that it seemed the gaily-dressed couples would never weary so long as it continued. Only Prince Lotus had stolen away from the dance with the Lady Nautilla on his arm. It was not tedium that had prompted him to seek the cool privacy of the jade stairway with his partner. His fine brown eyes were aglow with the lust of creation, for had he not composed that waltz in honour of the lady by his side? He had a great desire to mount the gallery that faced the

## THE FORGOTTEN THING

musicians across that kaleidoscopic space, and, with the Lady Nautilla by his side, watch the effect of his music upon the dancers. Outside a crescent moon hung in the sky, and from far away came the beat of the great sea rollers against the long white mole.

“All for you, little grey mother,” said Lotus, as he seated himself by his partner’s side. “The very best I have to offer. Do you accept it as such?”

Nautilla clasped and unclasped her hands upon her frock of grey poplin.

“It’s very pretty,” she said with a smile. Lotus dashed his plumed bonnet from his head.

“Pretty,” he said petulantly, “you say ‘pretty,’ and smile like a—I don’t know what to call a smile that looks like a note of interrogation at one side of your mouth. Pretty!”

“It is pretty,” repeated Nautilla with the slightest possible compression of her lips. “I thank you for it; but, Lotus dear, is it really the best you have to give?”

“Some men,” said the Prince with studied

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

calm, "some men would be fantastically boorish if you treated them as you treat me."

Nautilla laughed. It startled one when she abandoned herself thus suddenly to mirth. It was like the stirring of sheltered waters.

"I don't mean that I want you to write me an oratorio," she said. "I can't think of any music I like better than your waltz."

"Well, then, you might be a little jolly over it. This is festa night. Everybody is jolly except you, and you sit there like a—like a secret pain or a prophetess or something."

Nautilla tapped a suede slipper upon the parquet floor.

"Festa night," she said. "Oh, Lotus, isn't it pathetic?"

"Pathetic? You do use strange words."

"Little butterflies twirling round and round for joy because for another year they will be allowed to drift on in the old way."

Nautilla's voice grew tense and almost harsh. Her sloe-black eyes pierced the prince as she turned to face him.

## THE FORGOTTEN THING

“ You adorable fanatic,” he said. “ Why can’t you accept things as they are ? ”

“ Accept the Baldareel Buzz ? ” she said. “ Never.”

She turned and regarded the dancers again. “ Poor little midges, little drones dressed up in your silks and satins, prisoners who are content to be so because your prison does not seem to hurt you. To-day you have appeased the spirit who has made you your prison, appeased his anger because once there were a few men in this city who thought that no price could be too high for freedom

‘ Saving this, that once a year  
Red terrible wings make shadow.’

If only someone would make it possible to write a ballad of Claribel Town without that verse.”

“ You’ve no sense of history, Nautilla,” replied Lotus. “ The town was built on a condition. That condition was broken by a little gang of harum-scarums who tried to sail away from the town, and incidentally from their obligations, and very properly lost their lives.”

“ Done to death in the open harbour by that

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monster before the eyes of their parents, friends, brothers and sisters."

"It must have been rather beastly," said Lotus, "though I have no doubt the old pictures exaggerate the horrors. It's just as well, perhaps, for then the children know what to expect if they succumb to the wish to be off and away."

"I should think it ought to be quite enough for them to see the horrible thing in the sky once a year when he comes for his appeasement token."

"It's very impressive," said Lotus.

Nautilla laughed, and this time there was bitterness in her merriment.

"Impressive!" she said. "You come out with the word as pat as any of them. Your father said it was impressive and I suppose you will teach your son to say it. It is not impressive. It's ludicrous."

"Really, Nautilla, I sometimes think that all that visiting you do among the poor puts ideas into your head."

"I say it is ludicrous to see a king with a crown on his head prostrating himself upon a red carpet,



## THE FORGOTTEN THING

and offering a golden shield to a great red monster who is so eaten up with conceit that he can't bear to think that anyone should think of venturing from the city he made. Look at old Sir Luzifuz standing there by that dolphin. He never dances. He is too sad. He is a broken-hearted old man whose dream has come true. He has made and un-made kings, he has lived a long life in this stifling atmosphere. Sometimes I have surprised him gazing out at the harbour, and his eyes are bleak and cold. I know that he is thinking of the shipping that ought to be there. A harbour without shipping is a sadder thing to see than a barren wife, and it has always been so in Claribel Town."

"But look at our marvellous natural resources. What need have we of intercourse with the outer world when we are able to satisfy every desire?"

Nautilla stretched out a hand towards the throng. The slender wrist protruding from the small white cuff seemed informed with a strength that would not be bent back.

"Desire!" she said. "What do they know of

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any desire but the common desire to avoid being hurt. Oh, Lotus, if on this festa night—so-called because to-day we have once more consented to live another year in shame and ignorance,—if on this festa night you would offer me some token that you revolt against such conditions of life, it would please me more than all the tunes that ever came out of the woods or the sky or the sea.”

Lotus took one thick braid of her black hair into his hands.

“ I wish you wouldn’t be so down on the poor old *status quo*,” he said. “ You see I’ve a static temperament. I like Claribel Town. It’s nice to know that there is a heap of mystery and wonder beyond the harbour bar, but I’m quite content to take that on trust. It is enough for me that you came out of it. Do you know that when I saw you lying upon the beach with the red seaweed strands in your beautiful hair, and your face like a fragile shell you seemed to invest the sea wrack all about you with a wonder that was terrible and delicious at the same time. Nautilla, the flower thrown up from the sea, foreign lands are in your

## THE FORGOTTEN THING

eyes, strange clouds and cataracts are in your hair. There is no mystery I would solve but you, and there is nothing I desire but you."

"I wish you would talk like a man and not like a chameleon in a hot-house," said Nautilla. "It may be I am different from the rest of you because I was the last to come. I cannot forget so easily—or rather I should say it hurts me to forget."

"Sir Luzifuz has caught sight of us," said Lotus. "Shall I signal to him to join us. You've made me thoroughly miserable, Nautilla. Now you can have a turn at Sir Luzifuz."

"Do you know one of the things I can remember, Lotus, was a picture on an old book cover. Inside there should have been a fairy story, but there wasn't. The fairy tale had been torn out and someone had used the cover to bind up a favourite book of cookery recipes. You are like the picture on the cover, Lotus, the picture of a prince in white satin. I slept with that book under my pillow, and slaved at my letters so that I might read his story."

"Nautilla," replied the Prince, "you need not

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continue. I refuse to be turned into a parable, and I've a good mind to give this beautiful black braid such a pull that you would drown my music with your screams."

"He stood for me as a symbol of all that was gracious and comely," continued Nautilla unabashed, "but I never knew his story. I believe it was a tale to make your heart sing."

"Nautilla, what would you have of me? You torture me with longing for I know not what."

Nautilla rose to her feet. It was wonderful to see how the small figure in the Quakerish costume could assume such majesty.

"Destroy the Baldareel Buzz," she said. "Rip out the cookery book and get an inside of your own. Lead the people on to something that is real and something that is their own. Every year the Baldareel Buzz grows bigger. Do you suppose he will always be appeased by a golden shield? Some day the supply of gold will fail, and then—what then?"

"Lady, you might as well ask me to destroy the thunder and lightning."

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Nautilla had seated herself again, and now rested with her chin in her two hands.

"England," she murmured to herself. "England."

"Nautilla," said Lotus piteously, "what is it you say? You are a most distressingly dynamic young person."

"England is a name I can remember," replied Nautilla. "Help would come from England."

"Yes, but my gentle child——"

The Nautilla Waltz came at last to an end. Nautilla rose, and held out her hand to the Prince smiling.

"Thank you for the waltz. You have made it for me. Now will you make me something else?"

"Anything of which this poor brain is capable."

"Make me a ship, Prince Lotus," she said, and brushing his hand softly with her lips she turned, and ran lightly down the shallow green stairs. Prince Lotus stood gazing after her.

"A ship," he muttered to himself, then he sat down, and burying his face in his hands allowed his mind to travel down strange avenues of thought.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

It was thus that Sir Luzifuz came upon him when the last dancer had left the hall and the great double bass had been tucked into its green baize night gown. The old courtier had mounted the jade staircase on his way to the apartments he occupied in the palace. He went softly to the stooping figure and touched a shoulder with a light hand.

“What ho, your Royal Highness,” he said. “What sorrow is it that drapes you with its mantle?”

Sir Luzifuz had a distinct flair for archaic speech. It chimed in with the gentle melancholy of his bearing. He suggested a figure wrought elegantly of ebony and ivory. His face was an almost perfect oval, and his eyes were as black as his doublet.

“Ah, Sir Luzifuz,” said the Prince, “you’ve come upon me like a conscience. Shall we walk awhile on the terrace? I am in need of counsel.”

“I have noticed,” replied the courtier, “that the way of the world is little changed when youth and age take counsel together. However, a walk

## THE FORGOTTEN THING

on the terrace with you, Prince, would be a solace to an old man who is apt to quarrel with his bed for the rest it withholds."

"Your arm, then, Sir Luzifuz," replied the Prince, and together they passed through a long window which gave out on to the terrace. Under the stars and sickle moon the old courtier grew expansive. He had a great affection for Prince Lotus whose father he had succeeded in placing upon the throne of the state of Claribel. He had watched his development closely and centred great hopes upon him. Deep down in the old man's heart there was a stubborn something that clung to the illusion that Claribel Town was a new Jerusalem called into being by his own initiative. Many things had happened to shake his belief. There was the tragedy of Roldo and his followers who built a ship and attempted to leave the town. There was the growing bulk of the Baldareel Buzz, and the ever-increasing problem of providing the appeasement shield when he came on his annual visit, and lately it had seemed to him that the docility of the people had become almost sinister,

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

But perhaps what had shaken the old man more than anything was the coming of Nautilla. It was barely twelve months since she had been cast upon their coast, bound fast to a spar. He could not help feeling that the event had fired the imagination of the younger folk and set the spirit of inquiry afoot. The Lady Nautilla had responded to this questing tendency with a consuming zeal to know how everything was done in Claribel Town, and to put in order what she found to be amiss. She became attached to committees as if by a kind of homing instinct. She was known to the people as "the little grey mother," she had completely captivated the Prince, and, in short, was making herself a general nuisance—or at least Sir Luzifuz would have put it so a month or two back. That evening as he walked with the handsome, generous boy at his side he felt that he would gladly surrender any vestige of resentment against the little grey mother. What did it matter if Claribel Town were not all he had hoped it to be? What did anything matter? He was a weary old man, and his couch conspired with a hundred



## THE FORGOTTEN THING

phantoms of gloom to keep the sleep from his eyes. Something of all this he communicated to Prince Lotus by means of highly figurative phrases and courtly innuendoes. Lotus heard him patiently, but at last he could hold back the pent-up waters of his thoughts no longer.

“What manner of fellow was this Roldo, Sir Luzifuz?” he said at last.

“Roldo,” replied the courtier, “was a star-haunted man. He cared more for a dream than he cared for his life. I would not say that I think the worse of him, though he flouted me, for the Baldareel Buzz is my desire become corporeal.”

“Would it break your heart if I were to build a ship, Sir Luzifuz?” asked Lotus. The old man gave a wry smile.

“What harm should I take from a ship of your building?” he asked. “Your ship would hover a moment on the waters like a sea gull, and then be seen no more.”

“Would it anger you if I were to outwit the Baldareel Buzz and get away to sea?” further pursued the Prince.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

“ How can the Baldareel Buzz be outwitted ? ”  
replied the old man.

\* \* \* \*

“ How can the Baldareel Buzz be outwitted,  
Brian ? ”

My nephew rose and massaged a foot that had gone to sleep as we sat in council at the sign of the red box.

“ It’s quite clear to me,” he said, “ that Christopher must be got over.”

“ Yes,” I replied, “ but how are we to get that wooden ship past the harbour bar without sacrificing Lotus ? ”

“ Lotus was on the ship that Christopher saw,” said my nephew. “ We’ve made that part up, you know. And he had Sir Luzifuz with him.”

“ How did they diddle the Baldareel Buzz ? ”  
I asked.

At this point M’Curdy entered.

“ A parcel for you, sir, by the post—English stamp,” he said. He placed into my hands a disc wrapped in stout paper.

“ Open it, Brian,” I said.

## THE FORGOTTEN THING

I heard the paper giving up its prisoner.

“ A gramophone record,” said my nephew.  
“ ‘ The Ship of Heart’s Distress ’ sung by John Somerset.”

“ Good old Harris Tweeds,” I said. “ How decent of him to remember me. Tell your mother I’m coming to tea to-morrow, and please may I use the gramophone. Now you cut along.”

It may be remembered how John Somerset started us on our way with a notion. In our next chapter it will be set down how he came to our aid a second time.

## CHAPTER X

### ANOTHER SUGGESTION FROM THE MAN IN HARRIS TWEEDS

Bright is the ring of words  
When the right man rings them,  
Fair the fall of songs  
When the singer sings them,  
Still they are carolled and said,  
On wings they are carried.

Robert Louis Stevenson.

IT may be that I credit Moira with a *savoir faire* that is not really hers. I only know that she helped to make that afternoon when I brought John Somerset in to tea, one of those rare occasions when I feel I have taken hold of life again. Surely it was some instinct of stage-management that prompted her to bake and ice just such a walnut cake as had been set before the wandering minstrel on that good day of mine, when she learned from Brian that John Somerset was once more with me, so to speak, in essence, and that I wanted to hear his voice again in her drawing-room. When I

## ANOTHER SUGGESTION

entered next day with Somerset in potted form under my arm I found the gramophone manœuvred into position, and Brian with a clean collar and scrubbed hands and knees. I do not know whether this ceremonial cleansing was Moira's idea or his. It certainly heightened the general effect of tea-partydom. I could feel him heroically suppressing himself as I fumbled about the machine. It must often be a sore temptation to him to let his small, nimble hand play the hare to the tortoise of my groping fingers. Presently the disc whirred. There came the metallic tinkle of the accompaniment, and once more Harris Tweeds was of the party. The setting was Arthur Loft's, the words translated from a Scandinavian poem :

'Twas not the painted galleon that set the city free,

'Twas not the ship men doted on that brought the blessing back.

A great sun drowned at close of day, what time she put to sea :

A people's lust went out with her along its golden track.

But as she cleared the beacons twain her dizen'd plumage flapped,

The brazen bauble in the west was turned to sullen fire :

Then like a traitor's plighted word her rotten mainmast snapped,

And men grew sick to look upon the ship of heart's desire.

A snub three-decker kissed the tide and held upon her course,

With sails as white as albatross and hull as black as raven,

Of sappy pine and tough teak shaped, with sweat and grim resource

By blackened and unlovely serfs within a lonely haven.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

And as the watchers blenched to see their darling sprawl and sink,  
The homely craft obeyed her helm, and took the fiery track.  
Men lifted eyes, and saw her dark against the sea's red brink,  
And at the dawning of the day she brought the blessing back.

'Tis not the painted galleon that sets my spirit free,  
The gaudy ship of heart's desire is sport of blast and foam,  
But all the while I dreamed and planned my foolish argosy  
Was wrought the ship of heart's distress that brings the blessing home.

"A very proper man is John Somerset," I said  
as I brought the disc to a standstill. "He spreads  
sentiment over the surface of things like jam over  
bread."

"It's a queer song," said Moira; "there's  
a large tear of mine just fallen into the sugar basin.  
I can't say whether it's the song or that voice."

"Really, Moira," I said, "I thought the Irish  
were a restrained race. How is Brian bearing up?"

"I was thinking what a goat I was not to think  
of it before," said my nephew.

"Think of what?" I asked.

"Why there must be two ships of course. One  
ship must diddle the Baldareel Buzz while the other  
one gets away."

"For the dear's sake, Brian," said his mother,  
"what are you talking about?"

## ANOTHER SUGGESTION

“ By Jove, of course ! ” I cried ; “ a decoy ship. Old Harris Tweeds has given us the tip again.”

“ For the love of goodness take your tea,” said Moira, “ and stop talking like two Americans at a base-ball match. I might seek high and low for any sense in what you say.”

“ Mummy never can remember names,” said Brian.

“ You invent so many beasts and bogeys that I lose count,” said Moira.

“ It wasn’t a snub three-decker that Christopher saw,” Brian mumbled between a bite and a bite.

“ That’s a very small matter,” quoth I ; “ the point is that we now see our way clear.”

“ There’s Dad,” said Brian. “ Isn’t he early ? ”

He was out of the room in a flash with tidings, no doubt, of the gramophone record.

“ I don’t know where all this romancing leads to,” said Moira as she handed me my second cup.

“ It leads nowhere,” I said, plying my spoon with the air of a man who stirs among the philosophic deeps. “ When you are my age you don’t want to get anywhere. I want to be allowed to

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

indulge a dream for a little while, 'a dream untroubled of hope.' Of course, that does not apply to Brian, but he'll grow out of it presently. Then he can tackle the rocky road to Dublin, and put things straight in grim earnest."

Then Moira flashed upon me a quite unfamiliar facet. How could Shirley have called her lym-phatic?

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Dick," she said. "You wouldn't be thinking, surely, that I'm letting these days go by and never telling myself that they're the best I shall know. I know that something's got to catch him soon. I'm not a fool, and I shan't try to hold him back. Yet all the same I sometimes watch him when he's asleep in his bed, and it almost seems a pity he has to wake. It's queer to be so happy and not knowing it all the while."

"Do you think Brian is happy, then?" I asked.

"Did you watch him dart out just now?" she replied enigmatically. Then she gave a funny little click with her tongue.

"Something on your frock?" I enquired.



## ANOTHER SUGGESTION

" I'm so sorry," she said, " I keep forgetting."

" Oh, dash it all, Moira," I replied, " do you suppose I didn't see him ? I saw Jerry at twelve with a difference, and the difference is just what I like to make it."

At this interesting point Brian returned with Jerry. Jerry at thirty-six ! I simply do not attempt to visualise Jerry as a father and a ratepayer. For me he is always a rattled young bridegroom in his grey flannel travelling kit. I remember how he seemed to appeal for my approval with his eyes exactly as he used to do when he had brought off a pantry raid or made a decent showing at back-yard cricket. There are only a few occasions in life when one is sufficiently detached to take measure of one's brother. Jerry provided such an occasion by getting himself married. I took dispassionate stock of him as he held my hand while the motor strained at the leash to whirl him off to the unknown. It was well I did, for I never saw him again.

I wended my way back to my little shack after a second rendering of " The ship of heart's distress," by John Somerset. Alone at my desk I did

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a thing which I will record here as I want Brian to understand how well employed I really have been upon our chronicle of Christopher and Claribel Town. I took a sheet of paper, put it in the frame, and covered it with little dots. They all spelt Shirley's name. Then I lit a pipe, and inwardly vituperated John Somerset for playing upon my ill-regulated emotions with his potted song. It was not the song that had upset me, but the thought of all that surrounded its composition and rendering, that world where Shirley and I might have done such splendid things.

## CHAPTER XI

### “ COME ON BOARD, SIR ”

And I stood on a giant deck, and mixed my breath  
With a loyal people shouting a battle cry.

A. Tennyson.

AS Christopher kept on his way towards the ship he had little to spare for wondering what those on board would have of him. Seen from a distance above, the dogged little swimmer in the red Canadian bathing suit would have appeared as a tiny piece of casual flotsam, seaweed or lobster bait that could find no resting place. Yet all the while there was that forward movement, so slow yet so indisputable, denoting the exercise of a right good will. Something drew him steadily on, despite his cramped and aching limbs. You have only to look at the picture on the red tin to understand how this was so. It had been the conch that drew him first, but after a blind battle with the sea battalions he was strengthened by something

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that was even more heartening. The sound of cheering came to him across the water, and seldom did a better sound fall on human ear. As he shook the water from his eyes Christopher gained a closer view of the ship, and watched with a palpitating interest the signs of activity on board. A boat was being lowered from one of the davits. The men who manned it looked as if they had been hastily summoned from a masquerade to do duty. Nothing in the way of cut or colour seemed too fantastic for them, and they tumbled over one another in such a knockabout fashion that Christopher swallowed a pint of salt water through laughing at them. There was small matter for laughter, for the boat wobbled downwards for a few feet and then stopped altogether. Christopher, who by this time had drawn almost to within hailing distance, was especially intrigued by the expressive gestures of the young man who seemed to be in command of the operation. He was dressed in white doublet and hose, and as he waved his arms, pounded his fists, and jumped from one foot to the other, his little cape flapped

## “ COME ON BOARD, SIR ”

on his shoulders like a banner. When it became clear that something had finally jammed, he tore his plumed hat from his head and danced upon it. Then leaping upon the bulwark he stood poised for a moment like a figure in a charade, and then dived headlong into the sea.

This was the signal for a tremendous commotion on deck. There was a rush of harlequins, pierrots, cavaliers and clowns to the ship's side. Faces were framed in the square ports below decks. One little fellow in a red jelly-bag cap and a jockey's silk jacket leaned out so far that he was with difficulty pulled back by a policeman and a pantomime djinn. Two life belts, a hen coop, and a milking stool splashed after the diver, and a rope ladder rattled over the side. Christopher clenched his teeth for the final effort. The young man was making towards him with one of the life belts in tow. The cheers from the three-decker redoubled. At last Christopher felt something under his arms that was not the yielding water, and knew that his long swim was ended. He allowed himself to be piloted to the ship's side.

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“ Have you strength for the ladder, Master ? ” asked a voice in his ear. “ You will like to board your ship with dignity.”

“ My ship ? ” gasped Christopher.

“ They hope for so much from you,” said the young man, breathlessly.

“ They shall not be disappointed,” said Christopher, and grasped a rung. He went up the side slowly, but with his head thrown well back.

“ How they cheer,” he thought to himself. “ There’s no doubt they wanted me.”

At last he stood and dripped upon the deck with the tatterdemalion crew grouped about him. An old man stood at their head, an old man in red. As he approached Christopher there was the jingle of little bells that depended from his cloak and cap. There was that about him, despite his quaint attire, that commanded Christopher’s instinctive homage.

“ Come on board, sir,” he said, bringing his hand down from the salute with a smack upon his wet thigh.

“ Nay ! nay ! ” said the old man, “ I do protest.

## “ COME ON BOARD, SIR ”

Such subservience from a master of men puts me altogether out of countenance. You wrong the high dignity that is yours.”

Christopher did not feel very dignified as he shivered there in his sagging bathing suit. His eye roamed ever the great expanse of deck, and as he looked, those assembled began to chant a kind of slogan.

Free fairway by night and day from Claribel Port to Devon,  
Who shall take our right away to travel the oceans seven?  
Do your worst, red wings accurst, and know that the bargain's ended.  
Though we die, our hearts are high for thought of a wrong thing mended.

Christopher was thrilled by both what he saw and what he heard. What he saw was a good ship in such a muddle that his whole being rejoiced at the prospect of tidying her up. What he heard was a loyal people shouting a battle cry. He had yet to learn what the nature of the struggle was to be. For the moment it was quite enough to know that there was a place for him at the head of a crusade.

The young man who had followed him dripping up the ladder now stood by his side. A sudden silence fell on the company.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

“ This is one of those moments,” thought Christopher, “ when I wish I had my papa’s platform manner.”

“ Gentlemen,” he began, “ unaccustomed as I am to public speaking——” then his voice failed him.

“ Men of Claribel City,” broke in the old man, “ let a deed speak in the place of many words. England has given us a leader. Here and now I make over my command. From now on we take our orders from Captain—Captain——”

He turned to the new leader with a gesture of interrogation.

“ Christopher,” said the boy in the red bathing suit.

“ Christopher,” everybody shouted.

\* \* \* \*

“ Christopher ! ” I said. “ Do you know the time, Brian ? We must leave the decoy ship for another evening. Can you hear the sea to-night ? ”

Brian threw up a window and let in the frosty night air.

“ I can hear it,” he said. “ Oh, how bright the stars are.”

I followed him to the window. Our hill is within



## “ COME ON BOARD, SIR ”

long gun range of the open sea, I suppose, but only when the sounds of the day are stilled does the murmur come up from the long coast line.

“ Why did we call it Claribel Town ? ” asked Brian irrelevantly.

I had imagined him voyaging in spirit among the stars.

“ I really don't know,” I replied, “ unless it was because you always chose Claribel when I let you pull out one of my organ stops. Do you remember how you used to sit beside me as I played ? ”

“ Of course I do,” he replied, “ when I was a nipper. The free Port of Claribel. I like saying that. Good night, Uncle Dick. Thank you for the bother of me.”

I heard him racing up the little path, and presently Jerry's door opened to admit him and closed again. I lit a pipe and sat for a while by the open window in my British warm. That closing door had spoken of happiness and security of something which passes.

There remain the stars, the hills, and the unhoused sea.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE COUNCIL OF THREE

. . . He that hath the steerage of my course  
Direct my sail. On, lusty gentlemen.

*Romeo and Juliet.*

CHRISTOPHER heard the tale of the decoy ship three days after his coming aboard the *Nautilla*. The interval had been well spent in putting things to rights. Christopher had not a master's certificate, but his knowledge of all kinds of sailing craft was profound. How he came by that knowledge is just one of those mysteries which Christopher alone could explain. No doubt in the old days, when his Aunt Mabel was rebuking him for wool-gathering, he was all the while evolving a lissom corvette out of his inner consciousness. He had seen what was wrong with the *Nautilla* at a glance. In the first place her deck-space was crowded with worthless lumber, so that the ship had the appearance of a travelling

## THE COUNCIL OF THREE

nautical museum. Then there was the question of the costume adopted by the crew, a small matter, but one that had some bearing on the problem as to the best way of running the *Nautilla*.

"I am sure they would be happier in white shirts and shorts," Christopher thought to himself. "If I am to succeed I must take care that I don't run after that word which my papa loves so dearly, 'Efficiency.' I am a champion of freedom, but all the same I think a uniform would help things along."

Accordingly one of the first orders that he gave was to the ship's tailor, the excitable little man whose jockey's jacket had protruded from the port-hole. The tailor consulted with the chief steward, the pantomime djinn afore-mentioned, with the result that the morrow was appointed a make-and-mend day. Before the *Nautilla* was set upon her homeward course the whole crew were mustered for inspection in their neat uniforms of white drill. The main deck where Christopher inspected his men had in the meantime suffered a sea change. Poultry coops and vegetable crates

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

had been banished aft, and some picturesque lumber, such as a spare figurehead and an extra set of capstan bars in fumed oak, ruthlessly jettisoned. Christopher had no use for the Louis Quinze mirror in his state room. It accordingly disappeared. There were other furnishings which he suffered to remain for reasons to be explained later.

When at last the *Nautila* and her crew were rendered a little more seaworthy, Christopher called Sir Luzifuz and Lotus to his cabin for a consultation. There in his ample quarters which smelt pleasantly of newly sawn wood and coal tar, he heard the story of Claribel Island. At a quarter before midnight this council of three seated themselves about the curious oval table in Christopher's cabin. The stars were paling by the time they rose. The man on duty might have glimpsed them as he paced the quarter deck, the elfish old Luzifuz who had retained his cap and bells, and the two youthful figures clad in white, the dark head and the fair both resting on elbows planted on the table. Sir Luzifuz sat in a high-backed

## THE COUNCIL OF THREE

chair carved with great skill so that an oaken eagle seemed to spread wings above his head. Christopher had been for stowing away both chair and table, but the old man had pleaded for their retention.

“ When you have heard me out,” he said, “ you will understand.”

The first King of Claribel had been seated on that chair when young Luzifuz, the King Maker, had crowned him under the aegis of the Baldareel Buzz. The table had only recently been fashioned under the direction of the Lady Nautilla. Upon its smooth surface the following little legend had been delicately scratched :

From this council board of kings  
Wide-eyed wisdom shall take wings,  
And the lilies of freedom flower.  
Hatched a mighty plot shall be  
By the sage and potent Three,  
And the Baldareel Buzz shall cower.

“ You see,” said the old man as they seated themselves, “ the words of the soothsayer are fulfilled.”

Christopher read the lines.

“ These were written by someone with second

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

sight," he said. "Are there witches in the land where you come from?"

"There is one," broke in Lotus, "through whose witchery this good ship was built."

"Built she was in a northern haven," the old man went on, "built in secret by newly-awakened men for love of the little grey mother."

"Nautilla," said Lotus, and he seemed to play with the name as a fountain jet plays with a coloured ball, tossing and recalling it. "Nautilla, Nautilla."

"You mustn't mind him," said Sir Luzifuz; "he has inherited lyrical tendencies from a rhyming aunt."

"Who is Nautilla?" asked Christopher. "If you will tell me that it might help."

They told him all there was to tell of Nautilla, and then they spoke of the Baldareel Buzz.

"Oh, dear," said Christopher, when at last he had come to as complete a knowledge of the sinister spirit as could be vouchsafed to anyone. "Oh, dear, it looks like St. George and the Dragon over again. I was hoping that it was going to be something without a kill in it."

## THE COUNCIL OF THREE

"The Baldareel Buzz is an idea," said Sir Luzifuz. "My idea," he added with a sorrowful inflexion. "You cannot kill an idea though it may kill you."

"I'm so glad you said that," Christopher replied, lifting his chin from his doubled fists. "I think I see my way. You cannot kill an idea; you can only make it look small."

"Once it was small," murmured the old man, "like a butterfly on this wrist. That is why I took to cap and bells again when we came upon this quest. It was thus I was clad when the idea first came to me. I am ready to feel small again for the sake of the people. My sorrow is that the Baldareel Buzz is no longer mine, just as the poet's line is no longer his once it is caught up by another. I dreamed, and my dream came true."

"And I've been dreaming, too," said Christopher. "I've been dreaming ever since I saw the ship."

"You've been dreaming of an island where they want you to right a wrong," said Lotus.

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“ It would be a fine thing to do,” said Christopher with shining eyes.

“ It will be a hard thing to do,” said Sir Luzifuz. “ We cheated the Baldareel Buzz by a cunning device. A jeejaw barque of lath and canvas was set adrift in the harbour, and while the great red destroyer swooped down and demolished it, the *Nautila* put out from the secret haven and fled for the open.”

“ Three miles from the shore,” Lotus went on, “ the creature can harm no ship. We reached that mark with the red wings but a hundred yards from us. I tell you I had little relish for the music of those baffled pinions. I will confess that I cursed myself for a lovesick ninny, as many have done before me who have dared all for a woman.”

“ The Baldareel Buzz awaits our return ? ” said Sir Luzifuz significantly.

“ He could wreck this ship, I suppose,” said Christopher.

“ With one stroke of a red wing,” replied Sir Luzifuz.

“ It’s a pity you didn’t think of that when you



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put all this expensive furniture on board," said Christopher.

"We wished to do you honour," said Lotus. "No doubt you will think of a way to circumvent the destroyer."

"Do you think I am the wisest boy in the world?" demanded Christopher with a touch of asperity.

"I know you are," Lotus replied with the unflinching gravity of the young-eyed cherubim.

"Oh, dear," said Christopher, "it would do you good to hear what Derek called me the other day. You know I'm really a bit of a juggins. I'm not clever at all."

At this the other two threw back their heads and laughed. The old man's beard shook as it pointed upwards to the swinging lanthorn, and Lotus narrowly missed tipping his chair backwards to the crashing point.

"It is very lonely to be a boy of destiny," thought Christopher, not for the first time.

"Well," he said at length, "it's all very well for you to laugh, but for the moment I don't

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

see how I'm going to get ashore. How can I  
diddle the Baldareel Buzz? "

\* \* \* \*

"How can he diddle the Baldareel Buzz? "

Brian and I were seated among the rocks on the second beach at St. Clair. My nephew had been undergoing his second swimming lesson, and by way of consolation I had slipped the red tin into my pocket. It is no use pretending that Brian "took to the wather like ony little duck." I have no doubt that to-day he blesses Jerry for his firmness during that very painful period of his initiation.

"Christopher," I said, "is up against it. I don't like the expression, but I use it nevertheless. He is up against it."

My nephew flicked his towel.

"There was a boy in the baths with a red Canadian bathing suit," he said.

"Of course. How absurdly simple. The red Canadian bathing suit. Come along, Brian. The next session will take place in the shack to-morrow evening, weather and parents permitting."

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We made for the tram terminus, where we fell in with a friendly conductor who put us into the front seat.

"I wish swimming was as easy as this," said Brian as we sailed along.

"That's where you score over Christopher," I replied. "He didn't have to learn, so he never felt the wild joy you will feel when you swim your first five strokes."

Brian had no reply to this rather offensive little homily. If this should ever meet his eye I hope he will accept my apologies.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CLOTHES AND THE MAN: AN INTERLUDE

I sing clothes and the man.

Thomas Carlyle.

**I** SLIP these irrelevant sheets into Bundle No. 6 as an offset to a later interlude. I have just been reading *The Channings*, and the affair of the inked surplice has set me thinking of Willoughby Todd's Eton suit. This is the tale of another choir-vestry crime, with Brian as the villain of the piece.

I could never discover the secret of Willoughby Todd's unpopularity with his fellow choristers, but then I suppose I know little of the play and interplay of personality which goes on in that little state over which I am supposed to rule with the backing of Liddon Selby, my Vicar's assistant. I must resist the temptation of "writing up" Liddon Selby. Some day he may stump through a whole story of his own. I shall call it "The Wooden-legged Misanthropist," and it will be well

## CLOTHES AND THE MAN

larded with picturesque expletives. It shall be published posthumously when I shall be out of earshot of that holy man. I shall never forget Selby's manner of introducing me to my choir-boys for the first time. I believe that an enlightened brutality met the exigencies of the position better than any appeal to sentiment.

"Now, look here, boys. Mr. Burnard is blind, as you see. He is responsible for your voices, I am responsible for your good behaviour. If you want to sing he will teach you, for he knows how. He knows more about singing than you know about anything else. If you want to act the goat you can do so on the old terms, which means that you have to reckon with Long John Silver."

"It was very picturesque," I said to him afterwards, "but was it wise? They'll be calling me Pew."

"I daresay," he replied, "but they'll work for you. I could see they meant to."

It was some months after this introduction that Selby spoke to me of Willoughby Todd.

"I've been proselytising," he said to me one

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

evening and I've weaned a family away from Congregationalism. It's up to you to complete the good work."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There's a Mrs. Todd at the end of your street. She lives in an appalling house with scrolled iron all over it, and she's as vulgar as they make 'em. I like her immensely. I like Mr. Todd, too. He is, if anything, a shade more vulgar. Then there is Willoughby."

"Oh, but I've heard Brian speak of Willoughby. He calls him the boy with sixteen suits."

Selby laughed.

"I would never have set your nephew down as a droll," he said.

"I don't think he is," I replied. "What about Willoughby?"

"Over and above the sixteen suits Willoughby has a voice. 'Unto them which hath.' Mrs. Todd wants you to train him. She thinks you've got a musical face. Mr. Todd has been the object of a studied insult on the part of their minister, so they're coming over."

## CLOTHES AND THE MAN

“ Really ? ” I said.

“ Oh, that tolerant smile,” said Selby ; “ how well it becomes you ! ”

“ Send Willoughby along, then,” I replied.  
“ Sorry if I looked tolerant.”

Willoughby came next day with his mamma, and for hours after my room seemed to exhale expensive scent. I did not mind this, for I had come upon something that roused all the maestro in me, a voice of quite exceptional quality and a quick intelligence behind it.

Willoughby supplied me with much detail during our first lesson, details ranging from his sensations after taking laughing gas to the price of his mother's new opera cloak. He promised to appear at practice.

“ I wish Brian was eligible,” he said ; “ I wouldn't feel quite so on my lonesome. Brian and I are occasional playmates. I'm afraid he'll never set the Thames on fire, though. Too slow, dreamy-like, you know. Well, Ta, ta.”

I resisted the temptation to ask Brian for his opinion of Willoughby when he came in that evening, but I made him sing an octave. I am

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writing of very early days. Since then Brian has come on, but he will never sing like Willoughby Todd. He joined up shortly after Willoughby's initiation, but the affair of the Eton suit belongs to a later period. Willoughby appeared in it upon a Sunday in spring. One does not have to live in England to encounter local prejudice. Our garden suburb had its standard and our parish was just as parochial as any in the Old Country. It seems an extraordinary thing that an Eton suit should undermine the morale of an entire choir, but so it was. Never before or since have my choir been guilty of such a rendering of Jackson's "Te Deum."

"What was wrong this morning?" I asked Selby as we walked home. "The singing was like Shelley's 'Chorus Hymeneal,' 'a thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.'"

"You may believe me or not as you please, but Willoughby Todd has queered things by appearing in an Eton suit," replied the curate. "Most of these little colonials have never seen such a thing off the stage. It's upset them."



## CLOTHES AND THE MAN

On the following Sunday there was a fresh development. Willoughby had to run home in his shirt sleeves. His jacket had been removed from its peg. The inquiry that followed was quite in the vein of Mrs. Henry Wood, though with a less cloistered background. I must admit to something of a shock when Brian stood forth as the culprit. For the moment I had horrible visions of hereditary kleptomania.

“ You took it ? ” said the Vicar, “ but, my dear boy, do you know what that means ? ”

But here Selby broke in.

“ Excuse me, sir, you’ve asked every boy if they took it and they’ve all said ‘ No,’ except Burnard. Wouldn’t it be fairer——”

Then there spoke one Peter Green. I always remember Peter because of something Brian said of him. He had come upon a picture of Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness in my Doré Bible.

“ You know, Brian,” I had said, “ I can’t help feeling rather fond of Ishmael.”

“ He’s a bit like Peter Green,” he had replied.

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Peter on this occasion lost no time in putting the matter on a right footing.

"Please, sir, we tossed for it," he said; "somebody had to nick it."

"Nick it?" queried the Vicar. "What is the boy talking about?"

"Pinch it, he means," said Selby. "I think I can explain, sir. These young ignoramuses decided that Todd's jacket must be removed because in their village they don't wear that kind of coat."

"But where is the coat?" demanded the Vicar.

"Please, sir," said Brian, "it's in our wash-house."

"It's what they call 'direct action,' sir," said Selby.

"It's what I call unpardonable impertinence. I shall write to your father, Burnard."

"Please, sir, it was my fault," said the redoubtable Peter.

"Very well, Green, I shall write to your father."

"Please, sir," chimed in the unabashed Willoughby, "he hasn't got a father. An apology will be quite sufficient."

## CLOTHES AND THE MAN

"Upon my word," said the Vicar somewhat rattled by the titter which followed, "in my young days this sort of thing would not have been tolerated."

I presume that Peter was delivered over to Satan, but Brian's case was less hopeless. The letter duly arrived, and Brian took to haunting the shack like an unquiet spirit.

"What's happened about it, Brian?" I asked him.

"Nothing," he replied; "nothing yet."

A day passed, and I made up my mind to tackle Moira on the subject.

"For goodness sake," I said, "put the wretched child out of suspense."

"Brian has been forgiven," she replied. "He is going to the tailor's with me this afternoon."

"The tailor's?" I said.

"Yes," she replied in that pensive tone of hers, "he is going to be fitted for a new Eton suit."

"Moira," I replied, "I understand now what people mean when they talk of the latent strain of cruelty in the Irish race."

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

Brian's hand was limp on my forearm as we set out for church on the Sunday following the arrival of the cardboard box from the tailor's. I found myself humming :

My object all sublime  
I shall achieve in time  
To make the punishment fit the crime . . . .

but checked myself, and wondered how I could have been so heartless. At the church gate we ran into a posse of choristers.

" Good morning, sir. Good morning, Brian. Ahem ! "

" Good morning everybody," I replied.

Every little community has its comedian. He was not wanting on this occasion.

" I say, Bwian, is Lord Weginald in your form at Eton ? "

Then came the voice of Peter Green.

" You shut up, Saunders, or I'll punch your fat head."

We had another shocking rendering of Jackson's " Te Deum " that morning.

Moirá and Jerry always seem to tire of severity.

## CLOTHES AND THE MAN

Next Sunday Brian skipped bare kneed at my side.

Come fill the cup, and in the fire of spring  
The winter garment of repentance fling.

I hummed to an impromptu air.

Brian wears an Eton suit now on Sundays, but it is not the garment of repentance. That was posted off, at my charges, to a clerical friend of Selby's who has two small boys and a large parish, in the neighbourhood of Notting Dale.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LIBERATOR

He steps not down from palanquin or car,  
Or trireme beached by swarthy sullen slaves.  
No fanfares shrill announce him from afar,  
No silken banners droop from cedar staves.

\* \* \* \*

There is no high angelic harmony,  
Or earthly captain's blare and roll of drums :  
But like a shivering child from out the sea,  
Perplexed and stark, the liberator comes.

Charles Richards.

LIKE an outlaw on the confines of home, the *Nautila* lay out to sea three miles and some odd chains from the island, and a little to the northward of Claribel Town. There was small sign of the storm that had blown itself out on the previous day, and to the little group on the quarter-deck the prospect of sparkling water, distant white strand and blue hills would have spoken only of peace and homecoming, had it not been for those sinister red wings that beat a leisurely way across a mackerel sky. Christopher had donned the red Canadian bathing suit, and stood a little apart from the others,

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his hands clasped behind his back, the little breeze just stirring his mop of fair hair, and a tiny furrow between his eyebrows born of thought and resolve. As he gazed up at the enemy with whom he had come to do battle, there was an expression in his searching blue eyes that it would be very difficult to define. They were void of that light of challenge that one might have expected. One could have almost said there was a certain diffidence in his glance. He looked at the Baldareel Buzz as a backward boy might look at a prospective dancing partner. Sir Luzifuz, the only other red-clad figure upon the quarter-deck, muttered softly into his beard.

“He would build if he could,” he said. “Has he the strength to destroy? Have I sacrificed my dream in vain?”

Christopher raised his arms in the air and his young muscles seemed to ripple in the sunlight.

“The free Port of Claribel,” he shouted.

There was a stir in the little group behind him, and Prince Lotus was kneeling at his feet.

“I dared much for love of a woman,” said the

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Prince. "I would go through water and fire for you, Master. Let me try the passage with you. You have given us pride in ourselves and knowledge of manly things. If you should come to harm I should not care to live."

Christopher's eyes narrowed and something seemed to tug at a corner of his mouth.

"Two wet bodies don't make one dry," he said as he raised Lotus to his feet. "You must stay aboard, Prince, and wait. You'll be wanted to bring the *Nautilla* into the free port of Claribel."

"You ask a hard thing of me, Master," replied the Prince.

"Waiting isn't so hard if you wait in hope," returned Christopher. "I waited, you know, there by the red curtain. Ask the chaps to give me three cheers. That will be a good sound to take me over the side."

For a moment the dark Prince in his white Byronic shirt and serviceable shorts confronted his leader with something akin to mutiny in his eyes.

"Why was I wakened from sleep to be thus maddened?" he said.



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“ The Lady Nautilla has her way,” quoth Sir Luzifuz with his wry smile ; “ the virus works.”

“ Lotus, dearie, don’t ’ee take on so,” said Christopher. “ I want those three cheers. I want ’em badly.”

The Prince turned to the other white-clad figures.

“ Cheer, you devils ! ” he yelled.

As the first cheer burst forth, Christopher leapt to the bulwark. He stood there poised upon his naked feet as two more cheers followed.

“ The free Port of Claribel,” he shouted, and dived into the sea.”

\* \* \* \*

There was a part of the island which the Lady Nautilla loved to frequent whenever she felt the need of rest and reassurance. It was called the Windsteeple Cove, and for some reason not to be explained it was seldom visited by the people of the island. Nautilla found that when she came to this spot there was a brightening of those fragments of memory which she carried about like odd pieces of a painted window that has been

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broken. It always seemed to her that the place was free from the thralldom of the Baldareel Buzz. This impression was strengthened by a discovery she made upon a certain day of bright sunlight and racing wind when she had repaired to the Cove in search of quiet and reinforcement of spirit. As she came upon the beach her eye was caught by something dark that bobbed among the breakers like a porpoise. As she drew nearer she caught the play of sunlight upon wet wood, and made out the form of a boat which had evidently been drifting inland with the tide. It seemed to her like a harbinger from that outer world of which she longed to have word, and, to the ruination of her poplin frock, she waded in through the breakers and brought her quarry ashore. It was a stoutly-built dinghy, and, though it had shipped a goodly amount of water, it had kept right side uppermost in the midst of the breakers. Lashed to one of the seats was a sea chest, stouter, if anything, than the dinghy. Nautilla hauled her trove to the shelter of the nearest sandhill, and released the sea chest from its moorings. Then she buried it in the side

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of the dune and hid the boat as best she could with seaweed and driftwood. Later she returned to the spot with implements for opening the chest. She had a fancy that no one should share her secret. It was infinitely heartening to think that there among the sandhills lay something that was hers alone, something that had broken through the sinister cordon of the Baldareel Buzz. It made her hopes for the future freedom of Claribel Town seem more real than the bewitched city itself. The Windsteeple Cove seemed haunted by winds that whispered among the sand grass of freedom, and, by a happy chance, it was there that Nautilla found herself on the morning that the wooden ship was sighted. She had been sitting for the greater part of the night by the bedside of a sick child. The mother had been talkative above the wont even of cottage folk, and to Nautilla's rather jaded mind there seemed to be something of a menace underlying her chatter.

"If my man had been here," she had said, "he would have watched in his turn."

"We must have the little one well and strong

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before the ship comes back," Nautilla had replied, and she had been startled at the lack of conviction in her own speech.

"When will the ship return?" the woman said. "The ship that Roldo sailed was sunk, they say."

"That is true," Nautilla replied, "but the ship that is called by my name will carry someone who is wiser than the Baldareel Buzz."

"He must be wondrous wise. They say that in the olden times everyone lived in a palace that was planned by the Baldareel Buzz. There is not room in these days, and the king is too much set upon his pottery and his eiderdown quilts to care that the town does not grow with the people."

"My ship carries one who will set that to rights."

"They say you learned of him in a dream. I have dreams, but I could never get my man to put to sea for a dream's sake."

"Your man helped to build the wooden ship and sailed in her, not for the sake of a dream of mine, but because of something that I know."

"What is it that you know? They say you saw

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' England ' written on the sea in flowers as if they grew on a lawn. That is not much to come and go on. How did you put such faith into the heart of my man ? ”

“ I spoke to him of freedom. There can be no happiness in this land till the red wings are seen no more.”

“ The red wings have frightened my little one into a fever, it is true, but a worse thing might come to her if the Baldareel Buzz is put in a rage.”

“ We must have faith,” Nautilla had replied unhappily.

It was easier to speak of faith, it seemed, than to exercise it at all times. Not seldom had she regretted the quelling of that impulse to sail herself with the adventurous company. There had been women who had led men to battle. How much more difficult had been this heroism of waiting, keeping in good heart all those whose husbands, brothers, and sweethearts had gone off at her instigation. She thought of the way Lotus had smiled as he bade her farewell. It was the half quizzical smile of one who was not sure

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whether he went on a crusade or a wild goose chase. More provocative had been the expression of the old councillor's face. Sir Luzifuz with the burden of his so many years upon him cheerfully set sail on a venture which, if successful, would bring about the ruin of that dream made substantial, of which he had been the sponsor. One of those odd things that Nautilla could remember was a picture of an old gladiator which hung on a sunlit wall. Under it ran the inscription "*Moriturus te saluto.*" It was thus that Sir Luzifuz had spoken. He had saluted her as he went out, if not to die, at least to surrender all that in which he had taken pride.

"My head aches," Nautilla had said to the woman. "I shall go by the little path that leads to Windsteeple Cove."

Just at the point where the pasture gave way to the lupins and sand grass she came upon a little blue flower that grew hardily by the shingle path. As she bent to examine it, touched its blue petals with her finger, and looked down into its golden centre, it seemed that for an instant she was looking

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into the sun as it rode upon a blue sky. The sun had risen up from a sea that broke on an English beach.

“England,” she said softly to herself, “England England. You are not a dream. This little flower is more real than all Claribel Town because I have seen it grow by a path that led from the sea to an English farmhouse. I can remember that I passed a little flower like this as I went to fetch milk, and my pail made music as I went. If I wait I may remember more. I may remember everything.”

Kneeling down she almost pressed her face against the small flower as if she would have its secret from it by virtue of greater closeness. The flower only returned the gaze like a tiny child whom Nautilla had challenged to a game of “Stare-you-out,” and at last she rose with a little sigh and went on her way towards the sea.

Rounding a hummock of marrain-crested sand she came within sight of the beach. Some fifty paces more from where she paused a red figure lay huddled. Her hands went to her throat.

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“ It is the boy who was more real to me than a dream,” she cried, “ but he is dead.”

Even as she spoke, however, Christopher was seen to raise a bent arm before his face as if in self-defence. Nautilla ran to his side. His hair was full of sand and matted with blood that had trickled from a wound on the forehead. There were marks of beak or talon upon arms and knees. With a throb of thankfulness that she had brought her first-aid kit with her from the house of the sick child, Nautilla dived her hand into her chintz bag. Her fingers worked deftly with lint and restoratives till she was rewarded when Christopher opened his eyes and smiled.

“ The little grey mother,” he whispered.

The tears brimmed in Nautilla’s eyes. She brushed them away, furious with herself.

“ How did you know ? ” she asked.

“ I saw you on the path where the little blue flowers grow,” said Christopher. “ Look ! ”

With difficulty he raised a hand, and pointed out to sea. Nautilla followed his direction, and saw, for the first time that day, the red wings.



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“ I beat him,” said Christopher. “ He could not touch me once my feet felt the Claribel sand. He touched me once or twice when I was on the way, though.”

He smiled, though it was clear he was suffering from his wounds.

“ Oh, don’t,” Nautilla moaned. “ Lie very still. You will be stronger presently, and then I can help you to a cottage. It is not very far.”

Christopher obeyed, and lay for a time with his head on Nautilla’s knee. The little grey mother bent over him. There was bitter disappointment in her face and a great tenderness.

“ He was to have come flying on wings,” she said to herself. “ No one will believe that he is the Liberator. Claribel Town will not believe in him.”

Christopher opened his eyes again.

“ I guess you’re as pretty as Topsy,” he said. “ Only you’re a darkie and she’s a cornstalk. Will you take me to the king, if you please. I’m better—ever so. See.”

A little cry of pain escaped him as he made the effort to rise.

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“ You must wait till you are stronger, Boy,” said Nautilla.

For answer Christopher got upon his feet.

“ I must go to the king at once,” he said.

In spite of her distress Nautilla could not but smile at the idea of this shivering and blood-stained apparition bursting in upon the repose of King Kapok, who at this moment had left his couch of gold wirework, with its pneumatic mattress, and was no doubt employed upon the proof sheets of his monograph on the rearing of silk worms and eider ducks. Had His Majesty not been quite out of touch with European savants, he would have enjoyed a world-wide reputation as an authority on all that pertains to the bed. His collection of eiderdown quilts was a thing to make you yawn.

“ Oh, Boy,” she said, “ I didn’t think you’d come like this. You must wait till—till you’re not quite such a mess.”

So Christopher spent his first day on the island, not in a triumphal progress to the palace by way of Doffing Row and the Piazza, but for the most part between sheets that had been spun by the

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sick child's mother. Nautilla tended him and the child alternately, and braved as best she could the tremendous question in the housewife's eyes.

In the meantime the streets of Claribel Town rang with the name of the Little Grey Mother. Where was the Lady Nautilla? Where on that day of all days was that quiet persistent young person who had instigated this baiting of the Baldareel Buzz? The great red wings had been seen in the sky out of all season, and a ship had been sighted from the top of the huge wooden effigy which stood at the end of the white sea mole where it had been placed in the hope of placating the monster in whose likeness it was shaped.

"Where is the Lady Nautilla?" the King repeated querulously as he pottered to and fro upon his roof garden. "I knew what it would come to. I told you so. Didn't I tell you so, Mr. Vice?"

The gentleman in flowered cretonne and full-bottomed wig whom the King had thus addressed, pulled a number of rings nervously from one finger and set them upon another.

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“ I told you so, too, Your Majesty,” he said. “ That is to say I told *them* so. I have always maintained, and I shall maintain that her influence is subversive. But Sir Luzifuz chose to think otherwise, Your Majesty. I have served in the capacity of Vice to your principal adviser for many years, and I yield to no man in my admiration for his grasp of essentials. But Sir Luzifuz, Your Majesty, is an old man. I use the present tense advisedly, for who knows what may have overtaken the ill-starred nonogenarian by this time. When the history of Claribel Town comes to be written and reasons are sought for his downfall, there will be but one answer, ‘*Cherchez la femme.*’ ”

“ Well, why don’t you ‘cherche’ her instead of talking to me as if you wanted me to vote for you or something. Where the d—— ”

“ Where is the Lady Nautilla ? ” came the cry from the crowded piazza below them.

Mr. Vice leaned gingerly over the parapet.

“ An ugly crowd, Your Majesty,” he said. “ I do not mean from an aesthetic point of view. They would make quite a nice splash of colour

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in the middle distance with a guillotine against the skyline."

"What do you mean, Mr. Vice?" quailed the King. "What do you insinuate?"

"Special edition," came the cry from the street, "Bad Business. Baldareel Buzz Unbeaten."

"I always appreciate Mr. Livewire's alliterative headlines," said Mr. Vice. "I am sure he would make something out of 'Kapok and Decapitation.'"

"Where is the Lady Nautilla," moaned the King.

"Where is the Lady Nautilla," asked one woman in shawl and petticoat of another as they stood at the end of the sea mole by the miserable little fleet of fishing smacks.

"Aye, where?" replied her companion. "And where's my boy who sailed in the wooden ship? Look yonder."

She pointed to the end of the mole where a very aged man with one ear missing and an empty sleeve was apparently being restrained from jumping into the sea by a stalwart youth in jersey and sea boots.

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"Old Gaffer Sturgeon has got 'em again," said a bare-legged child. "It's the sight of the ship. They do say he sailed as a boy with Roldo."

"That's true enough," replied a whiskered potman who was dressed like a toreador. "He was the only one that was not done to death. I am glad I was not such a fool as to listen to that prating young busybody."

As the potman spoke, a little bow-legged man, with tremendous eyebrows and head as bald and shining as a door-knob, nudged his companion.

"You heard that, Jasperado?" he said. "She hasn't got 'em all by the ears—the jade."

Jasperado inserted a dirty finger between his hairy throat and the collar of his red shirt. He was a huge fellow with a beard the hue of a fox's brush, and a skull formation that made one think of the pictures that hung in King Kapok's assembly hall, portraying the builders of Claribel Town. There were odd stories abroad concerning the parentage of this man.

"There are others, Titbash," he replied with a wink. "Fine boys, hey?"

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“Brawny boys,” replied Titbash, playing with the hilt of a dagger which sorted well with his suit of rusty black.

“Beefy lads with the fear of Jasperado in ’em, hey?”

“With the fear of the Baldareel Buzz in ’em. Well, it’s the same thing. When the Baldareel Buzz has ripped open this little god, this golden-haired Viking.”

Jasperado spat upon the ground.

“This darling of the Little Grey Mother. Little Grey Mother, hey? I call her a little grey——”

“Softly, you fool,” said Titbash, laying a restraining hand on the other’s arm. Jasperado growled.

“When news comes of the kill,” went on Titbash, “that will be the time to call Nautilla names—when the people know that the ship is doomed.”

Jasperado’s fingers clutched convulsively.

“If my master would let the Boy ashore,” he said; “if the talons would spare him for these fingers.”

“Peace, you fool,” quoth Titbash. “You can

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do nothing till his body comes ashore. The people will turn on King Kapok in due time. Masterly inactivity, that's the part for us to play."

In the office of the *Claribel Clarion* Mr. Livewire rose from his swivel chair and paced to the window whence he could command a view of the *Nautilla*. He had seen the red wings make towards Windsteeple Cove, and then return to hover in the neighbourhood of the ship.

"I told you so," he said, addressing the world in general. "This comes of tampering with the *status quo*."

He returned to his table and beat upon a hand bell.

"Ask Mr. Snippet to step this way," he said to the impassive clerk.

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk with the air of an actor who husbands a small speaking part. Upon the entry of a gentleman with tight black curls and sombre swallowtails and smalls, Mr. Livewire pushed his horn spectacles to his forehead.

"Snippet," he said, "have you that obituary?"

"There are so many."



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“ Sir Luzifuz. What will it run to ? ”

“ Well, sir, King Farniento had a complete edition to himself, and Sir Luzifuz is something more than a king. Besides, if I may say so——”

“ You may not say so, Snippet. Sir Luzifuz is as good as dead. The miracle-monger that our dear little prophetess promised us is either not on board, or else his charms work not. The Baldareel Buzz triumphs, the ship of fools——. By Jove, Snippet, that’s a happy turn of expression.”

“ Yes, yes,” said Snippet, “ The Ship of Fools, a very good title for your next, sir.”

“ As I was saying, Snippet, when you interrupted me, the ship of fools must either run a hopeless gauntlet——”

“ Pardon me, sir, but can you speak of a ‘ hopeless gauntlet ’ ? ”

“ Upon my word, Snippet——”

But Snippet was spared an outburst of editorial wrath by the entrance of the perfectly trained clerk.

“ Would you speak to Mr. Whippet, sir. He has important news.”

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“ Show him in at once,” said the editor.

“ Yes, sir,” replied the clerk without a trace of that tendency to over emphasise his sibilants which a less tutored functionary might have betrayed.

It would be interesting to conjecture by what instinct of heredity Mr. Whippet had been guided in the selection of the details of his make-up. His was the only bowler hat on the island. There is a second cousin of his who haunts the police courts of Thames Street and Marylebone with just such a bowler hat.

“ You’ll pardon my saying so, Excellency,” he said, “ leading articles may suit the old ladies, but what the man in the street wants is news. He wants an authentic chronicle of contemporary events.” He emphasized each syllable with a rap on the crown of his bowler hat.

“ If that’s what you came in to tell me, sir,” replied the editor, “ you’d be better employed elsewhere.”

“ Come to the point, Whippet,” said Snippet.

“ If they want their opinions moulded, they

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consult Snippet, but if it's news they want I have the goods." The bowler nearly collapsed at this drum head declaration.

"Well, what's your news?" barked the editor.

Mr. Whippet leaned over the editor's desk as if he were delivering the goods over a grocer's counter.

"The Liberator has landed on our shores," he announced.

## CHAPTER XV

### CONSOLATION MONDAY: AN INTERLUDE

Heaviness endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

*Psalms of David.*

I AM indebted to Brian for so many little acts of service that it is good for me to remember those occasions on which I stood by him. I shall not refer to the painful incident of Mr. Pinkerton's damson tree, though my nephew knows that at the eleventh hour I endeavoured to intervene, but all to no purpose. Placed as I was it really was unwise of me to call upon Jerry to stay his hand. Never again did I attempt to divert chastisement, but in the matter of C. J. Arthur and the cricket match I may claim to have been a factor in that notable reprieve. I once heard a psychologist say that our faculty for hero-worship is at its zenith between the ages of ten and fourteen. I trust

## CONSOLATION MONDAY

that Brian may still be hugging a few illusions when he reads this work, but he will no longer know that all-satisfying and penetrating glow of adulation which the name of C. J. Arthur was wont to provoke.

The early teens is also the period when there awakens in a boy's being that first passion for enumerating and tabulating which is responsible for much of the tyranny of which the human race is guilty. Your little baby will count its fingers and toes or take into consideration the multitude of the stars, but it will do both these things in a right and seemly spirit of nonchalance. But when a boy begins to take note of cricket scores, and to ponder upon bowling analyses and batting averages, he is all unknowingly surrendering his freedom. He is entering a region of false values from which he will only escape when he himself is finally tabulated out of existence, by some relentless presenter of vital statistics. So when I learned that Brian had been in trouble for working out C. J. Arthur's batting average in his copy book, I fell to quoting Wordsworth to myself.

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He came to me one Friday evening with the bat I had given him at Christmas reeking with linseed oil. There is an old superstition (may it never die) that if you anoint a cricket bat and then hold it up to be soundly thwacked it will be wielded with much greater effect on the morrow. As I held and Brian pummelled I lived again many far-off Friday evenings. Friday evenings when the Saturday on the other side of bedtime was so full of promise that the heart almost ached for happiness. In Heaven it is always Friday evening.

"Your father once gave me a bat like this," I said as Brian abated his bastinado. "I don't know now why he did. It cost him every penny he had, but I'm sure he had his money's worth. It made me feel cheap enough."

"How cheap, Uncle Dick?" asked Brian, thoroughly roused as he always is when I take a skip back across the years.

"Well, you see," I answered enigmatically, "it was rather easy to make your father cry when he was small."

"Oh," said Brian, and I cannot hope to indicate

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how very delicately he warned me off undesirable ground by his tone. We all have our little conventions. Brian preferred to believe that my boyhood passed in a statuesque contemplation of ultimate perfection.

“Willoughby Todd’s uncle once bowled C. J. Arthur,” he said by way of pleasanter discourse. “Willoughby’s always got something to swank about.”

“Well,” I replied, “you can tell Willoughby that your uncle once went in first with C. J. Arthur.”

“You didn’t, Uncle Dick. When?”

“In France. It was funny sort of cricket, but cricket it was and, what’s more, he was out before I was.”

“You never told me,” said Brian in a tone of such deep reverence that I burst out laughing.

“I never thought of telling you,” I said.

“You’re not kidding me, Uncle Dick?”

“S’welp me, it’s Gospel,” I replied.

“My word,” said Brian, “couldn’t you write to him when he comes to Dunedin? Couldn’t I take you up to him at the interval?”

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“ My dear Brian,” I replied. “ C. J. Arthur is a very famous man. He can’t be expected to remember every Tom, Dick and Harry. You’ve no sense of proportion, Brian. You can’t lump me in with General Gordon, Bobs, W. G. Grace and C. J. Arthur : and let me give you one little word of warning. It would be an awful thing if you were to get another bad report from school just about the time that C. J. Arthur arrives in Dunedin. Supposing your father were to say, ‘ You shan’t go.’ ”

Brian laughed as one might laugh at the idea of a lion in the garden.

“ It might happen,” I said solemnly.

Brian paused as if held in the grip of a horrible fascination.

“ I think I’ll go and do my compo. now,” he said. “ Good night. Did he call you ‘ old bean ’ or anything like that ? ”

“ I’ll tell you all I can remember about C. J. Arthur if you get more than half marks for your compo.,” I replied.

“ Fancy never telling me,” said Brian, and I



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could feel that he was pausing to regard me in a new light before he ran off.

I felt for my Braille anthology after he had gone. There was something about those little snatches of slang and about those huskier chest notes that warned me of creaking prison hinges. I lighted upon something of Harold Beeching's that somehow reassured me :

God who created me  
Nimble and light of limb,  
In three elements free  
To run, to ride, to swim.  
Not while the senses dim,  
But now, from the heart of joy,  
I would remember Him.  
Take the thanks of a boy.

"After all," I said, addressing one of the good bishop's candlesticks, as is often my wont ; "after all he is only on the borderland. I wish I could worship anyone as he worships C. J. Arthur."

The famous cricketer was the sort of man to revive one's belief in the Arthurian romance. In the first place, as I remember him, he was in appearance what the penny novelettist would call "a Greek god." In the second place, he had done most amazing things during the war. In the

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third place, he was one of the quickest and most graceful scorers in England. In the fourth place, it was said of him that he would forego his tea in the interval rather than send empty away those swarms of boys and girls who besieged him with autograph albums. If only I were fourteen again I should certainly join in the general chorus with clashing cymbals.

Brian ticked off the days until the arrival of the M.C.C. team, but before the dawning of that day tragedy intervened. Some malady of the mind or soul beset my nephew with the result that he could do nothing that was right. Matters culminated in another note from school with the result that Brian was not among those who passed the turnstiles when the M.C.C. team took the field. I do not think it is fantastic to say that this was the first time that a storm of genuine grief burst upon Brian. I could not help but be interested to see how he would trim his boat to meet it. I pleaded hard with Jerry for a revocation of his sentence, but my brother was obstinate, and I retired to the shack in anything but good order.

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I ought to say that, with a kind of perverted delicacy, Jerry stayed away from the match himself after I had declined his offer of escort. Altogether it promised to be a completely damnable day. I remember that I tried to interest myself in the Braille score of some new carols, but all the time

I looked through my tears at a soundless clapping host,  
As the run-stealers flickered to and fro.

I longed to go in search of Brian, and yet I knew that this was just what I should not do if I were to prove myself an understanding friend. I bent savagely over my little dots and wished for oblivion or lunch. At last there came a knock at my door, and I knew that my self-restraint had been rewarded.

"That you, Brian?" I inquired in my most matter-of-fact tones.

"Yes, it's me. Mum says, would you like to go for a long walk with sandwiches and stone ginger beer."

"And you too, Brian," I replied. "I should get bored with the sandwiches, and I would have nothing to talk to the ginger beer about."

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“ Oh, yes, me too,” replied my nephew, and if there was the suspicion of a hiccup in his speech that was all the indication vouchsafed me that he had but lately emerged from deep places. So it was not such a bad day after all. We walked at least fourteen miles, and added all that is to be found in the following two chapters to the tale of Christopher on the island. Cricket was not mentioned. For my part, I think that day should certainly be numbered on the tablet for all its sombre opening. There is something sacramental even in stone bottled ginger beer when it is quaffed beneath the sighing of pine trees, and with never a word of what was deepest in our hearts. I, the broken man, and Brian, the chastened boy, were one with George Borrow when he wrote :

Life is sweet, brother,  
In sickness, Jasper ?  
There's the sun, stars, brother,  
In blindness, Jasper ?  
There's the wind on the heath, brother.

I slept that night with the scent of hay in my nostrils and the sound of bees in my ears, and on the morrow came joy. I had been taking Sunday dinner with Jerry and Moira. It had been rather

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a subdued meal. Brian left for Sunday School a little earlier than usual.

“ I wish he wouldn’t smile like that,” Jerry said as the door closed. “ It makes me feel like Caligula.”

“ What was Caligula’s particular frightfulness? ” I said. “ I’ve forgotten. Why not call yourself Herod, as it’s Sunday? ”

“ Oh, well, the worst’s over,” Moira murmured. “ I’ve been feeling like a woman of Sparta.”

“ I expect C. J. A. will go in with somebody on Monday and knock off the runs. I forget how many they want. M’Curdy read me the scores. You see I couldn’t ask Brian.”

“ Let’s change the subject,” said Jerry, and we adjourned to the verandah. We were conversing and snoozing by turns when our apathy was disturbed by the click of the garden gate.

“ By Jove,” said Jerry, straightening himself in his deck chair, “ if that’s not C. J. Arthur it’s somebody dashed like him.”

It was C. J. Arthur. Someone apparently had spoken to him of me. It was rather characteristic

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of the man that he should not only have remembered me, but that he should spend an afternoon in a search for me when all Dunedin was waiting to lionise him. He took it for granted, of course, that we had been at the match on Saturday. Poor Jerry! I did not feel it incumbent upon me to help him out with his explanation. Arthur laughed in the perfectly charming manner proper to his state.

"If I'd been you I don't think I could have stuck to it," he said.

"He took me for a long walk," I interposed. "I was 'Paddy the Next Best Thing.' There are other things besides cricket."

"But, dash it all," said the great man, "didn't *you* want to see me bat?" and then I could feel that he had caught himself up.

"Of course I did," I replied, "but the innocent suffer for the guilty."

Then the garden gate clicked again.

"Brian," said Moira. "He will see you after all, Mr. Arthur. A higher power has ordained it."

There is little I would not have given for a sight

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of my nephew's face as he reached the verandah. C. J. Arthur handled the situation with the unfailing Arthur touch. If you have ever heard a boy in the presence of his hero you will understand how much can go to a simple "Yes, Sir." Jerry forgot how miserable he had been, and Moira, if she did not purr, made audible signs of pleasure, and employed strange native flowers of speech. Thus it is given to some to make the spirits of others dance. Brian produced his bat for exhibition, and the great man tried the spring.

"Excellent," he said. "Who gave it to you?"

"Uncle Dick, sir."

"Well, now," said Arthur, "I'm going to ask something of you, Mr. Burnard. I'm frightfully anxious that your brother should be there when I knock off the runs to-morrow. Will you allow Brian to take his uncle to the match?"

If it had been any use Arthur might have closed one eye at me. I could feel that he was revelling in Jerry's discomfiture.

"Oh, I say," said Jerry, "is that quite cricket to corner me like that?"

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“ Well, it is rather a shady deal, I admit,” said Arthur. “ Mrs. Burnard, what do you think about it ? I happen to want this thing done for me most particularly. Can you refuse me ? ”

“ Monday isn’t Saturday to be sure,” said Moira. “ Let’s be weak and yielding, Jerry. I’m quite destroyed with all the severity we’ve been having.”

“ How will you square Mr. Pinkerton ? ” asked Jerry feebly.

“ Who’s Pinkerton ? ” demanded Arthur.

“ Brian’s dominie,” I said.

“ I shall square Pinkerton,” said Arthur.

“ Where does he live ? ”

“ My dear sir,” said Jerry.

“ I shall invite him and his school to the match on Monday. Dash it all, isn’t it part of a liberal education to see my late cut ? ”

“ It is out of our hands,” said Moira.

I must close with one little incident of the match on Monday. Brian and I had seats in the pavilion. A completely demoralised Mr. Pinkerton sat in the midst of his academy in the grandstand. In



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front of me was the scent of grass that dried in the sun, and all about the cheery murmur of voices. I looked at the game through Brian's eyes, wondering in what part of his brain he had stored all those technical terms that came out so pat. Arthur was knocking off the runs in his best style. He had lifted two successive balls to the railings when there came the sound of splitting wood.

"Bowled?" I enquired.

"No," said Brian, "I don't know quite what's happened."

"Broken bat," said somebody.

"Where's the understudy?" said somebody else.

"Would you like to take it out to him, son?"

I felt Brian jump to his feet.

"This," I told myself, "is one of those moments by the memory of which we are sustained."

As the small boy in the white linen hat and grey shirt and shorts emerged from the pavilion with the large bat, a wag in the crowd shouted, "Batsman's name, please," and the joke was taken up. I do not know, but I suspect that Brian

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cast one glance in the direction of Pinkerton's academy.

“ Well, what did he say ? ” I enquired.

“ Nothing,” replied my nephew with a happy little chuckle, “ he just gave my ear a tweak.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LONE HAND

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting, too.

Rudyard Kipling.

**N**AUTILLA was preparing breakfast in the kitchen of her improvised cottage hospital on the morning following upon Christopher's landing when the little window was darkened by the apparition of a bowler hat. She was so put about that she nearly allowed the milk to boil over the confines of the saucepan.

"The press gang," she said as some shred of forgotten reading found its way into her mind. "Claribel Town will know for better or worse in a few hours."

She went to the door to meet the reporter.

"Lost lady's lair located," Mr. Whippet chanted.  
"Good morning, little grey mother."

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He whipped a notebook from the pocket of his overcoat. It was a dark blue overcoat with a worn velvet collar, and it had about it that indefinable aura which such overcoats acquire from contact with other people's escapades and crimes. It would be difficult to say whether the Claribel tailor's manner of cutting the garment or Mr. Whippet's manner of wearing it was responsible for this effect.

"I was met at the door of the humble tenement by the elusive lady," murmured Mr. Whippet as he wrote.

"My favourite flower is the forget-me-not," chanted Nautilla, "and I hate rice pudding. I am very fond of fret-sawing in my leisure hours, and I always clean my teeth with cigar ash."

Mr. Whippet regarded her professionally.

"I think you ought to know," he said, "that little details like that may interest Doffing Row, but if I were to write them up I should be poaching on Snippet's preserves. I rather think, too, that in his capacity of Lucy Locket of the Ladies' Page he has already done you. Now Miss Nautilla,

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Claribel Town is waiting for a lead from you. What about it? "

" I will not fail all those dear people who trusted me," said Nautilla.

Mr. Whippet scribbled in his book.

" What are you writing there? " Nautilla demanded.

" Enigmatic and emotional," said Mr. Whippet.

Nautilla stepped back with a gesture of impatience.

" Come inside," she said, " and do your worst."

Mr. Whippet accepted the invitation with alacrity.

He was confronted by Christopher clad in a cotton night shirt. It would be more correct to say that he was swathed in the garment, for it belonged to the absent lord of the house.

Mr. Whippet showed admirable presence of mind.

" Ah, the Liberator, I presume," he said, and sharpened his pencil.

" That's me," replied Christopher with his most winning smile. " Have you come from the King? I suppose you couldn't get me a pair of trousers."

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“ One touch of nature,” wrote Mr. Whippet.  
“ Liberator’s disarming directness.”

“ I say, you’re not a doctor, are you ? ”  
Christopher inquired.

“ I represent the *Claribel Clarion*,” replied Mr. Whippet, and I may here state that apart altogether from its political predilections it has always been the boast of my paper that we present salient facts without fear or favour. Might I ask in the first place for your impressions upon landing upon these shores ? ”

“ I was very wet,” replied Christopher. “ Wet and bloody.”

“ Savage sincerity,” scribbled Mr. Whippet.

“ You see I had to swim it. I can’t fly—not yet.”

“ We were given to understand——” said Mr. Whippet.

“ I am sorry,” said Christopher. “ Nautilla was disappointed too.”

“ How did you know ? ” asked the little grey mother.

“ I heard you when you had my head on your knee. You thought I couldn’t hear.”

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“ Pardon me,” said Mr. Whippet, “ you say you had your head on her knee. Have you any objection to my putting that down ? ”

“ I don’t mind if Nautilla doesn’t,” said Christopher. “ You see my head was lying on the sand.”

“ His breast was bare, his matted hair, etc.,” wrote Mr. Whippet.

“ I say, I wish you would get me a pair of trousers,” said Christopher. “ I’ll never get to the king at this rate.”

“ Ah, the king, yes,” said Mr. Whippet. “ If I may say so, Mr.—er—Sir—er—Lord—er——”

“ Christopher’s my name. Christopher Hartley.”

“ Well, then, sir, if I may say so, what you want to get at is the people ; and how are the people got at ? Through the press. Now, sir, I will not pretend that the attitude of the *Clarion* has been what one might call gushing towards you, editorially mind you, but if you care to show all the cards on the table, if you care to nail your policy to the counter, if you care——”

“ Excuse me,” said Christopher, “ trousers or

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no trousers I really must go and see the king. I can't have those poor chaps waiting out there an hour longer than they need. I have to tackle the Baldareel Buzz."

"But, Boy dear," said Nautilla, "what can the king do? Didn't Lotus tell you about his papa?"

Mr. Whippet waited for the answer with poised pencil.

"I only know that his father is king of Claribel Island," said Christopher. "I know our king would help me all he could if I came to set England free."

"Sovereign's sanction solicited," wrote Mr. Whippet. "England's example evidenced."

"It isn't much that I shall ask of him. A little wood and steel, some silk for wings, and a place where I may learn to fly, that's all."

"Christopher conscripts Kapok's cocoons," Mr. Whippet scribbled tentatively.

"Wings?" echoed Nautilla. "How can you make wings?"

"How did they build the wooden ship?" said Christopher.



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"Christopher's chimerical challenge," wrote Mr. Whippet.

"I thought your wings would be ready-made," said Nautilla.

"Well, I must be off," said the reporter. "They're keeping back half a column of the luncheon edition for stop press news. I may add, sir, that the *Clarion* will be delighted to present you with a pair of trousers, and any other garments that you may require. We only ask in return that you will give us the first refusal when you have time to write your reminiscences. Good morning."

Mr. Whippet disappeared through the low door, jamming his bowler upon his head as he went. In the roadway a young man in a velvet jacket and Georgian pantaloons awaited him. His straw-coloured hair was parted down the middle and the lower part of his face gave one the impression of the jowls of a sleuth-hound.

"Continue to watch the cottage," said Whippet. "Look out for a special messenger from Claribel. I'll be sending him with a parcel."

Mr. Whippet had a true flair for the journalistic

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“scoop.” He did not send Christopher garments that would cry out for attention, but the simple kit of a *Clarion* newsvendor. Thus it came about that while all the ladies in Doffing Row were agog by reason of the alliterative headlines of the luncheon edition there passed under the very noses of their carriage horses a golden-haired newsboy in the familiar white uniform. He had a scar upon his forehead, and an empty newspaper satchel over his shoulder. People hungry for news would make a dash towards him, and then retreat with an impatient “Sold out.” Christopher smiled as he heard them.

“I’m a whole special edition in myself,” he murmured. “If they only knew.”

Twenty paces to the rear of him the sleuth with his sombrero pulled over his eyes and his velveteen jacket turned inside out, was making a series of little dashes from the shelter of a lamp post to the shade of a statue.

“That’s the chap who gave me these togs,” thought Christopher. “He seems to be following me.”

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The knowledge that he was being shadowed only intensified the feeling of loneliness as he looked up into the faces of the carriage folk.

For the most part the women resembled painted dolls. Indeed it might have been a double procession of the dolls of all nations that went past the japanned railings, so varied and bright were the costumes. Christopher noted the superb dandies who lolled with elbows upon the glossy balustrade and swept off gorgeously plumed hats at every carriage that passed.

"That's why it's called 'Doffing Row,'" he thought. "Nautilla said I was to turn to the right when I came to the statue of a boy with bells on his cap and jerkin. Ah, here we are. That's Sir Luzifuz when he was a nipper, the boy who had to grow up. Jolly. Now I have to find Thistleup Lane. It's really short for 'This will lead you up.' It's one of those telescoped words like Charing Cross. I wish I'd let Nautilla come. But there, we have to do the big things by ourselves."

He turned and waved a friendly hand to the sleuth as he crossed for Thistleup Lane.

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Thistleup Lane as Sir Luzifuz had conceived it in his boyish ardour was to have led the wayfarer by an easy gradient to the piazza. One should have passed through it as through a cool passage before emerging into the sunlit space where one was greeted on the one side by the fairy-like structure of the king's palace, and on the other side by a view of red road, slender palms, a strip of sand, and then the blue sea with the long white wall running out like a promontory. But Thistleup Lane had fallen on evil days. Christopher had to bend his head to avoid the washing which hung dejectedly from slack lines. He had to be careful, too, not to tread upon vagrant geese and babies.

"Why don't they put them out in the sun," he said aloud. It is not certain whether he referred to the babies or the damp garments. As he came out upon the piazza a little cry of delight escaped him. Then a shadow crossed his face.

"Poor Sir Luzifuz," he said, "how he must have loved it. And I am come to destroy."

At the foot of the great flight of steps he encountered one who might have been taken for

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a sentry. Christopher remembered that there was just such a fine fellow in Derek's history of the British Army. His scarlet coat, white breeches and long black gaiters had that gloss upon them which the tissue paper had preserved in the case of the illustration.

"Is there any chance of seeing the king?" Christopher asked.

The tall sentry did not answer at first. He was gazing past his questioner with an expression of mild interest. Turning upon his heel Christopher saw that the sleuth was going through a silent but vigorous pantomime just within the shadow of Thistleup Lane.

"'Arf a mo'," said the sentry. "As you were. Move and you're as good as dead."

Without advancing any justification for the menace the sentry set his black gaiters in motion towards the entrance of Thistleup Lane.

"Oh, I can't wait for that juggins," said Christopher, and ran up the steps into the vestibule. Here he nearly cannoned into an irritable gentleman in a full bottomed wig and a fawn coat that had

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so many little capes it gave the wearer a top-heavy appearance.

“ Well,” said the gentleman, “ are you the boy they sent from the *Clarion* ? ”

Before Christopher could frame an answer he continued, “ I am the keeper of no man’s conscience. I am not responsible for the vagaries of my royal master. He has written a sonnet appropriate to the disturbances of this outrageous day. He wishes it to appear in the *Clarion* and will entrust it only to the hands of an accredited agent of that journal. Follow me, boy, and remember who your are and whom addressing.”

Christopher was a little dazed by this rigmarole, but it appeared that he was going to be taken to the king and that was all that mattered. He followed Mr. Vice along a marble corridor and presently found himself mounting a stairway of green jade.

Mr. Vice knocked upon a door of satinwood inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

“ Come in,” quavered someone in a peevish falsetto. Mr. Vice turned the handle of cut

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glass, and Christopher found himself in the presence.

King Kapok reclined upon a divan with one of the famous eiderdown quilts about his shoulders and another spread over his knees. He wore a dressing gown which seemed to have been fashioned out of a similar covering, and upon his head there reposed at a jaunty angle what appeared to be a quilted tea cosy.

“Shut that door,” he snapped.

“The door is shut, Your Majesty,” replied Mr. Vice.

“Then it’s a nasty draughty door, a sinister door. I don’t like it. At any moment it may give to the bloody shoulders of the proletariat.”

“Your Majesty, remember, the boy,” said Mr. Vice with downcast eyes.

“It’s all right,” said Christopher, “he’s not swearing. You can say bloody when there really is some of it about.”

“Shall I have him removed, Your Majesty,” asked Mr. Vice in a voice whose studied calm was wasted upon Christopher.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

“ Your Majesty,” said the Liberator, “ I have come to set your people free.”

“ Indeed,” said the monarch, “ I understood you’d come for my manuscript.”

There came a knock upon the door.

“ It seems,” said Mr. Vice, “ we are on the point of a crisis.”

“ Which are always much pleasanter to read about than to deal with,” said the king.

“ Shall I open ? ” inquired the statesman.

“ I suppose you’d better,” said the king. “ Oh, that draught ! ”

The door was opened a few inches and Christopher caught a glimpse of a Roman nose, a laced sleeve, a section of satin coat and a shoe buckle.

“ The boy has arrived from the *Clarion* office,” announced a voice.

“ You expatiate upon the obvious, Mr. Deputy,” replied Mr. Vice.

“ Shall I show him up ? ” inquired Mr. Deputy.

“ He seems to be in the process of showing himself up,” replied Mr. Vice.



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“He is waiting in the Lavender Lounge,” announced Mr. Deputy.

“For goodness sake come in or go out,” screamed the king. “What’s all the bother about?”

At that instant a great bell began to echo violently through the palace.

“Fire and brimstone!” roared the king.

“That will be the Baldareel Buzz,” said Mr. Vice. “He has probably come to make an end of things.”

Footsteps were heard running about the corridors.

“Show a leg, Mr. Deputy,” cried Mr. Vice. “Bring word to the king of what’s afoot.”

“Close the door!” roared the king.

“Your Majesty,” said Christopher, “there is nothing to fear from the Baldareel Buzz. I am here.”

“There’s no doubt of that,” replied the king. “So am I here. We’re all here. That’s the devil of it.”

“It was the sentry,” came the voice of Mr. Deputy. “He rang the bell. There is a spy in the palace.”

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“What did he say?” quailed the king. “A fly in the palace!”

Mr. Vice was very grave, but his voice was steady.

“A spy, Your Majesty,” he said; “a spy.”

“A spy?” said the king. “What’s a spy?”

“I’m not quite certain,” said Mr. Vice, “but it must be something pretty bad, judging by the hullabaloo outside.”

A murmur that had been distant now seemed to come nearer.

“I think the populace are about to rush the palace,” said Mr. Vice.

“Then have my collection of warming-pans removed to the cellars,” said the king. “Order my barouche to the side door.”

“The servants are by this time disaffected,” replied Mr. Vice stoically. “It would be useless.”

The murmur increased to an uproar. From the piazza came the cry of a newsboy.

“Special Edition. Sovereign’s Sanctum Surreptitiously Entered by Suspected Spy.”

The king dashed his tea cosy to the floor.

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"Who is this boy?" he demanded.

There came a knock on the door.

"Another crisis," said Mr. Vice. "Shall I open, Sire?"

"Yes. Let 'em all come."

"The Lady Nautilla has arrived at the Palace," announced Mr. Deputy. "She craves an audience."

"Praise be," said the king. "Now we'll have a little peace and quiet."

"Show her up," said Mr. Vice.

"The Lady Nautilla, the Lady Nautilla!" shouted the crowd.

"They'll be good children now," said the king. "She knows how to handle them."

The little grey mother entered, flushed and distraught.

"Oh, Boy," she said, "you should have let me come. The *Clarion* has worked you up into a sensation."

"That's all right," said Christopher. "Come out on the balcony with me and I'll talk to the people. May I, Your Majesty?"

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

"Do you think it will quiet 'em down?" said the king.

"They will listen to the Lady Nautilla," said Mr. Vice. "I presume this young gentleman is the soi-disant Liberator."

"Don't swear, Mr. Vice," said the king. "Remember. The Boy. Oh, but, of course, he isn't a boy. He's a what-you-call-'em."

"Your Majesty," said Christopher, "your support at this moment means everything to me. I bring word from your son, from your trusted counsellor. Don't you understand? I am the boy for whom they sent the wooden ship. I have come to destroy the Baldareel Buzz. To give you the free port of Claribel. I am from England."

"England?" murmured the king. "Dear me, yes. I have a book about England. Tell me, is the warming-pan still in use there, or has it been relegated to the collector's room as is the case on this island?"

Nautilla opened her lips to speak, but at that moment there came the crash of splintered glass.

## THE LONE HAND

"Come along, Nautilla," said Christopher, and taking her hand ran from the room.

"The balcony!" he shouted.

Nautilla led the way, and in half a minute Christopher found himself in a position that would have gladdened the heart of his political papa. The crowd surged below him, such a crowd as had never assembled before. At sight of the Lady Nautilla there went up a cheer which brought a pallor to the cheek of the little grey mother. These people still believed in her. Had she unwittingly deceived them? She leaned her frail hands upon the alabaster coping and smiled down at them. Then she lifted her arm in a gesture that demanded silence.

"People of Claribel Town," she said, "is my word to be honoured or the word of the *Clarion*?"

There were cries of "We believe in the little grey mother," and counter-cries from a section of the crowd for the *Clarion*.

"Who were you with last night?" yelled the potman in the toreador rig who was by way of leading this latter section.

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

Mingled groans and cheers followed this pertinent question.

"I was nursing a sick child," replied Nautilla, "and a boy who was faint from loss of blood, shed on your behalf. He stands by my side, your Liberator."

"Thank you," yelled the potman, "I've never known a newsboy free me of anything except pennies."

"Where are his wings?" called a woman in a mob cap and short gown of figured silk.

"Yes, where are his wings?" echoed the crowd.

"My wings are in my heart," Christopher called as he jumped upon the balustrade where he stood poised as he had stood on the bulwark of the *Nautilla*. "How did I get ashore? I swam. See here."

He pulled up one leg of his loose white trousers and showed the angry scars. A sudden hush fell on the crowd.

"The Baldareel Buzz did that," he went on. "He killed Roldo. He couldn't kill me. I swam ashore and he followed me as a seagull follows

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a fish. He could not touch me when once my feet touched the ground. I was one of you then, but I owed no allegiance to him."

He pointed seawards to a spot where the red wings hovered. Jasperado stood in the crowd beside the bald little man in black.

"We must take him now," he said, rubbing his moist palms against his leathern shanks. "He's winning over the people."

"Hush, you fool," replied his companion; "give him the chance to make his boast. When he's failed—that will be our time."

"Will he fail?" quoth Jasperado.

"He cannot succeed," said Titbash.

"He has gone further than Roldo," muttered Jasperado.

"He will fare worse," said the little man puckering up his face into a grin. "The Baldareel Buzz has left you the work to complete."

Jasperado gave vent to a low growl, while his great frame quivered with the passion to hurt and slay. Once more the restraining hand was laid upon his arm.

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“Bide your time,” said Titbash. “Not for nothing are you Jasperado the wheelwright.”

The crowd, meanwhile, had seemed uncertain how they should take Christopher’s defiance of the Baldareel Buzz. Many were carried away by the Liberator’s courageous speech. Others seemed to fear the monster still. It seemed that opinion was delicately balanced. It would take very little to turn the scale either way.

On the outskirts of the crowd there was a little commotion and a murmur of voices. “Gaffer Sturgeon, Gaffer Sturgeon!” cried the children. The maimed old man hobbled forward.

“Take me to him, take me to him,” he muttered. “There are marks on my body such as he has shown. I have felt the talons, too. Take me to him.”

“Get that old bag of bones out of the way,” said Titbash to Jasperado. “He will play on the people’s feelings. Tell him you know the way to reach the boy and lead him off anywhere.”

Jasperado obeyed. Christopher continued to speak.



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"I was called away from a place that I love that I might help you. I have come to set you free."

"And to bring down the Baldareel Buzz on us, eh?" cried Titbash from the shelter of the mob.

"Go home, Goldilocks!" yelled the potman. "We don't want our livers eaten, thank you."

There were cheers and counter-cheers. Laughing, Christopher raised his arms as if he contemplated a dive from the balcony. His action brought the people to silence.

"Bring down the Baldareel Buzz," he cried. "Why, that's what I've come for. Don't you think he ought to be brought down? Doesn't he darken the sunlight for you. But for him you would be free to take the golden track across the water. By all means bring down the Baldareel Buzz."

"Bring down the Baldareel Buzz," echoed the children in the crowd.

"Bring down the Baldareel Buzz. Bring him down. Bring him down."

The rhythm of the words seemed to catch at the people's hearts.

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“ Bring down the Baldareel Buzz,” cried one and all. “ Bring him down, bring him down.”

So they continued, like the Ephesians when they acclaimed Diana, hardly knowing what they said. Titbash slithered his way through the crowd and walked quickly in the direction of the line of villas which stretched from the rear of the palace towards the foothills.

“ They will be crying, ‘ Break him on the wheel, break him on the wheel,’ in a few days,” he muttered to himself.

When Christopher realised that the people would listen no longer he jumped down from his eminence.

“ I don’t know whether I’ve carried them with me,” he said to Nautilla. “ That chanting may mean anything.”

“ They will all go home soon,” Nautilla answered. “ One cannot tell till to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow I start to make my wings. Do you believe I can do it, little grey mother ? ”

Nautilla smiled, but there was a question in her eyes.

“ I shall help you all I can,” she answered.

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"You doubt me," said Christopher.

Nautilla returned his gaze unflinchingly.

"I've never heard of silken wings before," she answered; "they take some believing in. But, Boy, I'll do all I can."

Christopher grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, come and talk the king over," he said.

"I shall want a good many yards of silk. He can spare it, can't he?"

They turned and re-entered the palace. King Kapok awaited them in the Lavender Lounge. He had evidently prepared for flight, should the necessity arise, for in place of the eiderdown dressing gown he wore a blanket ulster and a woollen night cap.

"Is the crisis past?" he demanded of Nautilla.

"They may keep that chanting up for a time," replied the little grey mother, "but there won't be a revolution to-night."

"And to-morrow?" asked the king.

"To-morrow, Your Majesty," said Christopher, "if you will give me some silk I will make my wings."

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"Silk?" said the king. "By all means. You really must come and see my silks. There's nothing like it in your country, I dare swear."

"I should love to," said Christopher.

In a very short time he had quite won the old man's heart by his naïve appreciation of his treasures. The king led him from room to room, prattling happily of all he had to show. With every new object that delighted his eyes, Christopher felt a little stab at his heart. This liberating business was going to cost something—was going to be a very lonely affair for him. However, a remark of the king at the close of the tour cheered him.

"They please you, yes?"

"I would never have thought so many jolly things could go along with a bed," Christopher replied.

"I would give them all for a chance to see new lands," said the king. "Did my boy see new lands?"

"Only from a distance," Christopher replied. "He will tell you of it."

"Oh, yes, yes, I had forgotten. We're having a

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crisis, aren't we? It's all her doing, you know." He patted Nautilla's shoulder. "Well, well, let's be comfy to-night anyway. You will dine with me? I want to talk about Jacobean bedsteads. Tomorrow you may have as much silk as you wish."

Christopher lay his second night on the island in the severe little chamber which Sir Luzifuz had occupied for so many years. It reminded him of a little room he had slept in when his father had taken him on a visit to a community of quiet men who wore cassocks and spent much time in a slate-roofed chapel. He did not sleep, but lay and thought till the dawn came through the window and he could see again the pictures and the illuminated bird's eye view of Claribel Town as the youth in the jerkin and bells had conceived it.

"There was one thing he forgot," he said to himself. "Poor Luzifuz."

He might with more justification have said "Poor Christopher."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CONFLICT

Angels and devils meet in the middle air,  
And brazen swords clash upon brazen helms.  
W. B. Yeats.

IN the pavilion at the foot of the archery green Christopher worked at his wings. The interest taken in his doings by the islanders was so fervent that his good humour was sorely taxed. It did not occur to him to erect a notice-board bearing the legend, "No admittance except on business." In any case it is doubtful if such a hint would have kept Mr. Whippet at bay. The *Clarion* had published an explanation of the spy sensation which had helped to sell the paper almost as effectually as the story itself. The idea had been born in the mind of the news editor's underling, and Mr. Whippet had seized upon it as an excellent way to introduce Christopher. Two sensations, as

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it were, had centred on the one boy. It behoved the *Clarion*, now that Christopher's identity was common property, to leave nothing to the imagination of their readers as far as the *Liberator* was concerned. So Mr. Whippet haunted the Pavilion, and as Christopher wrought with steel, wood, and yards of golden silk, he was run through a catechism that was both pertinent and comprehensive. Articles appeared in the *Clarion* upon Christopher's way of life in England, Christopher's taste in neckties, Christopher's theory of the planetary system. Sketches were reproduced of the wings in the process of their evolution, of the helmet and cuirass, and the long shining sword which lay in readiness on the Pavilion bench.

In the meantime there met in a villa, last of a line that stretched towards the foothills, a strangely assorted, and by no means prepossessing, company. At the head of a long mahogany table in a back room sat Jasperado the wheelwright, burly, narrow-eyed, with a beard the colour of a fox's brush. At his right sat Titbash, his leader's superior in

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intelligence, though an insignificant figure beside the red-shirted giant. The others about the table differed in physiognomy and costume, but in all there could be traced a resemblance to those shaggy creatures, who were grouped about Luzifuz when he came to build Claribel Town. A detailed account of their transactions is not necessary. It will be enough to record a conversation which followed on the entry of a strange being, who salaamed to the company. He was as black as a sweep, and his pointed beard and fuzzy hair gave him the appearance of a grotesque doll.

“ Ah,” said Jasperado, “ what is his news? Speak to him, Serigphat.”

At this the most ape-like of the company, a wizened little man in a green gaberdine and with a head that bore a rather gruesome resemblance to a cocoanut with the fibre half removed, turned to the incomer and began to jabber at a great rate. The black man replied in a falsetto, his words coming rapidly from him with an odd effect of being spoken through him.

“ He says that the apes will not come further than



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the ravine, but twelve of his own kind will be here to-morrow," spoke the interpreter.

"They would come quick enough with the Baldareel Buzz behind them," said Titbash.

"The Baldareel Buzz will not lose sight of the ship for a moment," said Jasperado.

"In that," quoth Titbash, "the boy is one up on us."

"Why not do it now?" growled Jasperado. "The wheel is ready."

"Let the Baldareel Buzz have the first refusal," said Titbash, moistening his lips. "He may not finish him off. On the other hand there is always the chance that we may find ourselves without a master."

Jasperado rubbed his moist palms upon his leathern shanks. "We serve the Baldareel Buzz," he said.

"By all means," assented Titbash. "While there is a Baldareel Buzz to serve. In any case we take the town, and the boy dies."

"Aye," said Jasperado, "but I would have him die on the wheel. The Baldareel Buzz may be too swift."

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While the men who went not with the wooden ship thus plotted his destruction, Christopher was trying his golden wings on the sun-flecked archery lawn. From every point of vantage there watched women, children, and such men who had helped with the ship, but had stopped short when it came to the point of embarking on the adventure. They were a gay, good-natured throng, glad of anything that was out of the ordinary, ready to applaud the enterprise if successful or to revert to the old order if Christopher should prove a second Roldo. It would mean a larger shield every year, and they would miss their friends on board the *Nautilla*, but the attempt would have been worth while, and there would be positions in the State offices to be filled. Mr. Vice would not be so popular as Sir Luzifuz, but Mr. Vice would not live for ever.

On the water front the Lady Nautilla was superintending the erection of marquees. To the band of workers she had organised she had but one answer, when they questioned her, "The Liberator wishes it." Into the marquees were carried supplies of food, cooking utensils and bedding.

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“What is the meaning of this picnic?” asked Nautilla’s helpers.

“The Liberator’s orders,” she replied. “That is all I know.”

Mr. Whippet noting their mystification made another journey to the Pavilion. Clearly this was an occasion when the people wanted authentic news. He came upon the Liberator decorating the hilt of the long shining sword. Christopher lunged at the bowler hat and neatly removed it. Then he presented the weapon to the reporter, who took it with care. A little exclamation escaped him as he felt the sword in his hand.

“Why,” he said, “it’s as light as a lath.”

“It is a lath,” Christopher replied. “It’s a harlequin’s sword.”

“You couldn’t kill a butterfly with it,” said Mr. Whippet.

“I don’t want to kill a butterfly,” replied the Liberator, “I want to catch one.”

Mr. Whippet felt feverishly for his pocket-book.

“Mysticism manifested,” he wrote.

“Mr. Whippet,” said Christopher, “you have

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been very nice to me in spite of that spy sensation. You sent along the togs. I couldn't have found my way to the king in that nightshirt."

"Don't mention it," replied the reporter. "Or perhaps I should say, don't mention them."

"I would like to do you a good turn," said Christopher.

"Mystic's magnanimity," murmured Mr. Whippet through sheer force of habit.

"You're after news, aren't you?" went on the Liberator. "Well, here's news for you. To-morrow I bring down the Baldareel Buzz."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. To-morrow the infirm and old will be carried to the marquees. The Lady Nautila has that in hand. Tell the people that to-morrow everyone should be on the piazza or the waterfront."

"But why?"

"One never knows," said Christopher. "It may be a long fight. But have no fear. I will bring down the Baldareel Buzz."

Christopher was true to his word. On the morrow

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he went up and challenged the Baldareel Buzz. But that was not all. Claribel Town went up as well.

There was no issue of the *Clarion* for several months, and when that journal once more appeared it began afresh, like everything else on the Island. You would not find an account of the conflict by consulting its files. A knowledge of the great event is taken for granted. As Mr. Livewire put it in the first leading article written after the cataclysm, "We appear to-day, white and virginal, a newspaper without a past." There are scores of men and women who could give you a graphic account of that day's doings, but if you were in search of such an account you would not do better than consult Mr. Whippet, for it happened that the journalist was in a position to speak of things which none but he had noted. It chanced that he was among the last to assemble upon the piazza, as up to the last moment he had been treating with the *Liberator* for those long-deferred reminiscences. It appeared that the town behind him was completely emptied of its inhabitants, the whole

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population having come out into the open to witness the conflict. Had Mr. Whippet been conversant with the ode on the Grecian urn of John Keats, he might have quoted from that poem :

What little town by river or seashore  
Or mountain—built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of its folk this pious morn.

It was after he had joined the crowd that something prompted him to glance back over his shoulder. Then it was he realised that, though Claribel Town had been emptied of its own folk, it was not uninhabited. From a top window of the villa nearest to the palace there looked out strange black faces. Mr. Whippet was not temperamentally a nervous man, but it came as something of a shock to recognise in those slim bearded creatures the traditional foremen of works who presided over the building of the first Claribel Town. They figured in the great picture that used to hang in the Lavender Lounge of King Kapok's palace, that picture which had for its subject the building of the town. At the sight of these sinister strangers, he instinctively turned to his neighbour, feeling that Christopher should be warned of their strange

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appearance. His neighbour happened to be the little dark-cloaked Titbash, who, in lieu of a sympathetic hearing, offered the very sharp point of an exceedingly bright dagger.

“Keep silence,” he said, “or you die instantly.”

Mr. Whippet (and who shall condemn him) attempted a pace to the rear and was instantly conscious of something sharp in the small of his back. Another voice spoke, saying, “Keep silence!” Mr. Whippet realised that at the rear of the multitude were grouped a body of men to whom Mr. Livewire had more than once referred as “the makings of an underworld in this fair city.” They were the men who had not helped to build the wooden ship, not because of principles such as those held by the *Clarion*, but because of some sinister reason of their own. Mr. Whippet felt as if he had run into a quickset of news. He was literally impaled upon sensation. He appreciated the irony of his position. His note book burned in his pocket, but he dared not put a hand in its direction. He had a wild notion of yelling “danger!” at the top of his voice, even if that

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warning should be his last uttered word, as seemed most likely. He had almost screwed himself up to that courageous point when there went up a mighty roar from the people as with one accord they looked up in the direction of King Kapok's roof garden. Christopher had started on his flight. The islanders saw him shoot up into the sky like a bird of golden plumage with an underside of white. The sun flashed upon his helmet and cuirass, his arms showed white against the golden pinions upon the framework of which they were firmly thonged. When he opened out his wings he made a cross in the sky with his limbs, his feet being firmly held together with the toes down, as is the case with the gymnast as he passes along the row of rings. From one wrist depended the great shining sword. To Christopher the islanders in their many-coloured raiment must have appeared like the throng in some solemn picture. He might have been reminded of some incident in the story of the Children of Israel as he remembered it set forth in colours in Topsy's Child's Bible. From the height where he flew he



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would not be aware of detail. There would be only the area of colour spread out like a patch-work quilt across the piazza and the water front. Up and up he mounted until the watchers were conscious only of something that glinted in the sky. Now there were two points for all to watch, the point where the golden wings shone, and the spot where the red wings waited. A silence fell on the people. Mr. Whippet found his voice at last.

“ Danger ! ” he shouted.

But Titbash was too quick for him. Before the journalist had opened his mouth the man in black yelled, “ Three cheers for the Liberator ! Keep cheering,” and Mr. Whippet’s warning, if it could have been any use, was drowned in the noise that followed. Far away the people saw the golden wings dart swiftly and close with the red. For a time it seemed that the Baldareel Buzz had his enemy in a terrible grip, and there were no golden wings to be seen. Then a strange thing happened. The red wings seemed to shrink in size and the golden wings dropped from the embrace. Rising

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again Christopher attacked once more. Again the Baldareel Buzz shrank in size and Christopher's wings could be seen circling about the red pinions waiting for an opening. Now it was no longer the golden sparrow versus the scarlet hawk. There was no difference in size between the contestants. Again they met, and after this attack the Baldareel Buzz seemed smaller still. The red wings made off, but the golden gave chase, and closed about them even as the Baldareel Buzz had closed about Christopher at the first attack. All eyes were straining out to sea, following the conflict, when that thing happened which is sung of in the ballad which has replaced those older verses from which I quoted:

Three blasts blew both sweet and shrill,  
The populace turned astonished,  
A score of huts stood on the hill,  
And Claribel Town had vanished.

Claribel Castle and Claribel Town  
Had gone like the mist from the mountain,  
Floated away as the light thistledown,  
Colonnades, dome, lawn and fountain.

Claribel Town that was built without pang,  
Built without human endeavour,  
Built by dumb slaves who rejoiced not nor sang,  
Melted and vanished for ever.

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No one shall say how long the people stood dumbfounded. They had turned as a man at the unearthly sweetness of those three blasts of the conch, and there they stood still as the wife of Lot who looked back. It was just as if they were looking upon that picture of the old settlement that used to hang at the east end of the ballroom in King Kapok's palace. But it was a picture that moved. Birds flew among the trees that sheltered the clearing, and a little stream gushed down the sandy hill where, but a minute ago, Thistleup Lane had been. Gone was Doffing Row. In its place a little to the north there was a plantation of palms. Before the largest hut there capered those little black men whom Mr. Whippet had seen at the window of the villa. They rubbed their bodies and grimaced as if they had taken some hurt, as indeed they had, for they must have obeyed the law of gravitation when the villa with the rest of Claribel Town went up into the thin air.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE ELFIN TURNKEY

All that I took from thee I did but take  
Not for thy harms.

Francis Thompson.

THIS chapter has nothing whatever to do with Christopher. I write it in a mood of self-indulgence, for to write about oneself is to follow a lure most seductive. Also I should like Brian to know some day, some comfortably distant day, how very well timed was that visit of his when he came to me so early in the morning with that bunch of lilac still wet with the dews of dawn. I shall never be able to ask him how much he knew of my trouble, why he rose so early that morning, and whether it was through divination or simply by chance that he chose lilac for his *vade mecum*. First I must write of John Somerset. The baritone did not stop short at the gramophone

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record. There followed in the wake of the "Snub Three Decker," a long series of letters which I read with alternating delight and chagrin. It was good to know that our London was still there, that London which has the Albert Hall and Covent Garden for two of its boundary marks: yet I chafed in exile as I read, or, to be more accurate, as Moira or Brian read. There came a period when the series was broken and I made up my mind that Somerset had outgrown me. Then came a note which put me in such a flutter as I had not known since the eve of my first circus. John Somerset was to be in Dunedin about the end of the year with a concert party of his own.

"I charge you to avoid the puff preliminary," he wrote, "and to read nothing of me or my team. Come to my first concert with a mind clear of cant. It will thrill us to know that Lynx of the *Night Watchman* is sitting in the stalls, dispassionate, inscrutable, intolerably just. Don't think of me again till you find yourself seated before the platform with the gossoon on one side and the lady of the house on the other. I shall send you

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four tickets, and after the show you shall have supper with the entire strength of the company. I do hereby counsel whosoever shall read this letter to you that all newspaper references to me should be withheld from you."

"What does he want to play the mystery man like that for?" I said, as Brian finished the letter.

"I'll tell Mummy and Dad and M'Curdy," said my nephew.

"Tell them what?"

"Not to read you what the papers say about him."

"Are you winking and striking the side of your nose with your forefinger, Brian?"

Brian laughed that sudden husky little laugh of his.

"What do you mean, Uncle Dick?"

"It looks rather like a conspiracy," I said. "I believe you want to feel you've got me in your power."

"I'll read anything you ask me, Uncle Dick," Brian replied, and I wish I had some means of reproducing the tone of his voice.

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“ I was only pulling your leg, old man,” I said hastily. “ I shan’t think about John Somerset till three minutes to eight on the night. It’s his idea and we’ll carry it out.” Of course, I thought a great deal about John Somerset, but I carried out his instructions, and was deaf to all newspaper references. I believe I did this as a kind of penance for wounding Brian’s feelings. He had taken Somerset’s words quite simply and seriously, and I had thought for the moment that he was adopting that pose of cheerful bantering camaraderie of which he is constitutionally incapable. Of my best and trustiest friends Brian is the only one who is deficient in a sense of humour. He is just as vulnerable in that respect as Jerry was. I have to interpret those odd little silences of his to myself. I keep writing of him in the present tense as if an end had not come to the Brian of these pages. Let me return to the business in hand, which is really to write about myself.

At five o’clock on the afternoon of his first concert John Somerset called me up on the telephone.

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"That you, Lynx? Somerset here. Only just arrived. The missus elected to do the journey from Oamaru by motor. You've got your tickets?"

"Your missus?" I gasped.

"Your tickets, have you got them?"

"Thanks awfully, yes. But, Somerset, your missus——"

"You'll be there?" he replied.

"Yes, rather. But, my dear fellow, you never told me——"

"And the gossoon, will he be there?"

"Yes."

"And the lady of the house and the impeccable husband—they will be there?"

"Yes. But, Somerset, your missus——"

"That's all right. They will hand you over to me after the show?"

"Thank you, if you wish it."

"Good. I shall now go and have a hot bath."

He rang off before I could get in another word. So that was his dark secret. The fellow was married. Did she belong to his team? This question was answered for me amid the rustling



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of programmes and the banging of tip seats as our party took their places in the Burn's Hall.

" Song recital by Mr. and Mrs. John Somerset," my nephew read at my elbow, " assisted by Arthur Loft."

" So that's his team," I said. " The big three. I thought it might have been Japanese acrobats or performing fleas. What is Missus going to sing first, Brian ? "

" The Cadenza from ' Lucia di Lammermoor,' Donizetti." He spelt out the Italian, letter by letter.

" Good," I said. " None of your tushery for Mrs. S. What after that ? "

" ' David,' " Brian replied. " Then there's ' Arthur Loft ' in thingimygigs."

" Italics. That must be something quite new of his. She's a soprano. What is Loft going to play ? He opens proceedings, doesn't he ? "

I learned that Arthur Loft was to open with three Chopin preludes. One of these was to be the seventeenth.

" Oh, damn," I said, " I don't think I can stand

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Seventeen. I'm sorry, Moira, I didn't mean to swear."

"How funny," said Moira, "I like Seventeen best of them all."

"So do I," I said, "so did Shirley."

I fancied I could feel Moira stiffen ever so little. She had no particular reason to dote on Shirley.

"Here comes Arthur Loft," said Brian. "No, it isn't. It's the man to put the lid up."

"'Decorous' was the word she used to describe Seventeen," I went on, half to myself. "We used to call it the lilac prelude. What's John Somerset going to sing, Brian?"

"Something that looks mighty like German," Brian replied, but at that moment there came the surge and ripple of applause as Arthur Loft walked on to the platform. I am out of business now as a critic so I shall not give a detailed account of the concert. Somerset followed upon the three preludes with "Du bist die Ruh." I knew that his voice had gained something in quality as soon as he began to sing. Brian was like a young hound on the leash as he sang "The Ship of Heart's

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Distress." Then came Mrs. Somerset. I don't think I was perfectly sure it was Shirley even in the second verse of "David." Then she came back and sang that most beautiful, perfectly poised, old love song, George Linley's "Kate O'Shane," and I knew without a doubt it was she. I could see her standing by the piano in her gardening smock with her hair in two long black braids like Nautilla's. On her cheeks was that flush which we were daring to hope meant the return of health. She was looking at me with that odd quizzical expression.

"You're the very latest of them," she was saying. "Well, I'd sooner have you with your singing cure than old Doctor with his vaccines. It must be something easy to-day. Let's have 'Kate O'Shane.' "

I sat in my stall like a man who has suddenly been deprived of an elaborate apparatus of defence. Those last few years so carefully planned with a view to sanity and forgetfulness had gone for nothing. I was back in the old morass. There was only one hand that could pull me out, and that hand failed me. One heard so much of those

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wonderful marriages when men seemed almost to be saved despite themselves. Who shall blame Shirley for lack of faith? There was that little hard core in her which refused to allow her to be quixotic.

“ If I’m going to live,” she once said to me, “ I must be ruthless. If I’d had my own way I’d have died, but between you all you’ve made me tenacious of things. You’ve made me ambitious about singing to cure me, and the cure may prove worse than the disease.”

“ What rot ! ” I had replied.

“ I’ve a slow-moving mind,” she had gone on, “ and it’s hard to turn it off its course. I believe I could be selfish for the sake of my singing now, just as a mother can be selfish for the sake of her baby.”

Can I blame her because she could not see that I would have helped, not hindered, her singing, even as things were? Yet was it not something of a surrender of her great principle to be touring the colonies as Mrs. John Somerset? If she had trusted me she would have travelled as Madam

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Shirley Grant. I would merely have been "at the piano." I sat and listened to Shirley and Somerset singing the duet from "Samson and Delilah," and the situation was not relieved by the thought, the discovery that all that elaborate camouflage on the part of the baritone seemed to me for the first time to be a trifle vulgar.

At last I turned to Moira. She, of course, had said nothing.

"I think it would be better," I said, "if you and Jerry slipped away with Brian as soon as it's over. Somerset will drive me home. It's a small world, isn't it, my dear?"

"It's a cruel world," she replied. "I'm so awfully sorry—so awfully, awfully sorry."

We sat the rest of the concert out, doing our best to regard the performers impersonally and getting what satisfaction we could from the music. Moira rose as a few enthusiasts were still clamouring for an encore.

"Come along, Brian," she said.

"But we can't leave Uncle Dick here. He's to have supper."

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“Don’t be so fussy, Brian,” said Jerry. “Do as you’re told.”

Poor Jerry was finding it rather a small world, too. He had always been frankly afraid of Shirley. I heard him speak a word to an attendant, and I was left alone in the emptying hall. I waited till a door opened by the stage, and presently I was accosted.

“You’re the gentleman to see Mr. Somerset. I was told there was to be a lady and gentleman and boy with you.”

“They had to go,” I said vaguely. “Shall I go with you?”

I met Shirley and her husband in a dressing-room filled with the elect.

“Ha, ha,” I heard him say. “Now we’ll catch it. Here’s Lynx of the *Night Watchman*. Shirley, this is Mr. Burnard.”

“We’ve met before,” I said.

“Yes,” said Shirley, “I was so pleased when I heard you were coming.”

“I didn’t know that you’d crossed each other’s paths before,” said Somerset. “I let the cat out

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of the bag when I rang you up to-day. This should have been rather a moment. I wanted rather to bowl you over, you know, when I said 'My wife.' "

" I'm afraid I've rather bowled you over, John," I heard Shirley say. " I ought to have told you I knew Lynx. Do you think I ought to have tackled that Cadenza, Mr. Lynx ? "

" You took it in your stride," I replied. " I must congratulate you both very heartily."

Here Arthur Loft came up and made himself known to me. I was in some danger of gushing a little over Loft. I have seldom been so genuinely pleased to meet a man. I think Shirley was glad of his company also when we sat down to supper at Somerset's hotel. To this day I can only suppose it was some perverse imp that had prompted her to withhold from John Somerset the knowledge that R. W. Burnard was anything more than a name to her. It was midnight by the time Somerset deposited me outside my door. He had talked steadily as we drove along. I felt I was shirking my part in the battle against silence,

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

but I was feeling too limp to care. We shook hands at the door.

“ Good night,” he said. “ It’s been so ripping to-night.”

He turned to go, then seemed to hesitate.

“ Good night,” he said again.

If I had harboured bitter thoughts against John Somerset they vanished as he turned away with those words unspoken. He seemed to be like a big perplexed boy, who has unwittingly hurt someone, as he walked back to his taxi.

And now let me write, if I can, of that strange thing which befell me in the morning. Left alone I passed through four hours which I shall not attempt to describe. I believe the conventional thing to have done would have been to wreck the shack. I could not do this for there came into play that instinct, so fostered of late years, to avoid corners and sharp edges. I went about my room brushing things on to the floor with my sleeve or shoulder, and grimly replacing them with meticulous care. I had to fight against an almost unbearable longing to waken M’Curdy. It seemed



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a way of escape, and yet I knew it was no way. The idea of escape obsessed me. I wanted to get somewhere where there was no Shirley, and I could not. Back along the years I went and everywhere she was to be found. She got into our old nursery where she had no business at all, as she was not born when I inhabited it. She was there in that tall witch's hat and red cloak which she had worn in the children's operetta when I heard her sing as for the first time. She was there to remind me of what I had lost, that something of which blindness could not rob me. To be dressed like an old hag, and yet to be young and exquisitely fragile all the time, that was of the essence of romance. She had only to throw off her hat and cloak in order to escape. Escape, escape. That was what one thought of all the time. There was no escape without her, and yet one must escape from her. It was a vicious circle, a cat after its own tail.

It did not occur to me to undress and get into bed. There was an urgency that forbade it. Something had to be done before I could sleep.

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At last I sat down in my chair and I suppose I must have dozed, for presently I started in horror to think I should have so nearly surrendered myself to dreams that I dreaded more than those wakeful thoughts. Then I cursed myself for a fool and sank back again. Presently I dreamed. I was in a prison and alone with that one overmastering idea of escape. I knew that I had been a wretched fugitive outside, but anything was better than to be thus immured. I knew that at last I had escaped from Shirley, but at what a price. Everything was gone. I had nothing with which to fill my brain. It was just a cold cavity. My limbs, too, were very cold. Then I knew that somebody was opening the door of my prison. There came a delicious breath of lilac.

“It will only be Shirley,” I said to myself. “It’s no use. It will all begin again. . . .”

But it was not Shirley. There stood at the door a small figure in a grey cloak and hood, holding in one hand an enormous key.

“This is something quite new,” I said to myself, and my relief at the thought brought the tears to

## THE ELFIN TURNKEY

my eyes. I knew that though my turnkey was bearded white he was not beholden to old age. Under that cloak the limbs might be lithe and supple, and at any moment both cloak and beard might be cast aside. It was not the witch who cheated palsying time, but a little old wizard who really was not old at all.

“Uncle Dick, Uncle Dick, it’s Brian.”

I woke to the knowledge of morning and the renewed scent of lilac.

“Brian! What on earth are you doing here?”

“You were talking in your sleep,” my nephew answered, “and it’s not fair to listen.”

I felt for my repeater.

“A quarter to six,” I said. “If I had only thought of the boy on the box I believe I might have saved myself a rotten night.”

“Would you like to come for a walk?” asked my nephew. “It’s so pretty now. I’ve picked you some lilac.”

“Put it into my Toby Jug,” I replied, “and then I’ll go along with you. Do you know the

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loveliest line of poetry in the world, Brian? It's 'Over the hills and far away.' "

As I stepped out into the delicious morning air with Brian's hand on my forearm I knew that I was a free man indeed, free to carry on in the new way and girt with enough of fantasy to face the world, and make a decent showing during Shirley's visit to Dunedin. Something had come in to take her place. How very strange it was that all that night I had not given Brian a single thought. Yet he passed a sleepless night, and I cannot but suppose he had been thinking of me. We tramped through narrow suburban streets till we came to a road that is flanked by hedgerows, not so common in New Zealand as in the old country. I think we hardly spoke at all. On our homeward way we met a milk cart or two. Arrived once more at the shack Brian filled me a pipe.

"You'd better be getting home with the milk," I said, but he did not answer. He had fallen fast asleep in the chair where he sat.

I left him where he was and walked up to Jerry's.

"Oh, Dick," I heard Moira say.

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“ Come and retrieve your son,” I replied. “ He’s asleep in my chair. He paid me an early call this morning, and took me for a walk. I rather think, too, that he’s saved my wits for what they are worth.”

“ Is there anything in the world I can do ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, there most decidedly is,” I replied. “ You can ask Mr. and Mrs. Somerset to Sunday supper and have me in to meet them.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN WHICH AN END IS CONSIDERED

I fear I shall be lonely when I get towards the end.

Hilaire Belloc.

YESTERDAY a thing happened which reminded me that I have been thirteen weeks occupied in the inditing of this tale. Brian came home from school. I did not go to the station to meet him, but abode in the shack and awaited. It seemed more dignified. He dropped in on me in the golden hour before dinner. I measured him by the old mark on my door and found that he had not grown beyond all seemliness. His voice perhaps was a shade huskier, but it was the same small quick hand I felt in mine.

“It looks like a reprieve,” I thought to myself. “They have not yet closed the prison doors on you.”

## IN WHICH AN END IS CONSIDERED

What I said to him was something quite different, some appropriate inanity. I was absurdly pleased at his evident delight at renewing his acquaintance with my household gods.

“Hallo!” he said as he came to the old Gladstone bag, “you have been busy, Uncle Dick.”

With a sudden qualm I realised that I had left it open and the bundles of Braille script lay exposed.

“Brian,” I said peremptorily, “please close that bag. That is a most profound secret. I know I can trust you not to touch those papers till I give you leave.”

He obeyed, greatly wondering. I don’t suppose I had ever spoken to him in such a way before.

“Fill me a pipe, there’s a good chap,” I went on, “then I’ll smoke and you’ll talk about school.”

Brian did not linger on the topic of school. He produced a linen-covered book with an elastic band about it.

“This looks like a sketch book,” I said.

“It is,” he replied. “They’re sketches and plans.”

“Plans?”

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

“ Yes, plans for the new Claribel Town. Fuzzy thinks they’re topping.”

“ Who’s Fuzzy ? ” I asked in some haste. This revelation of Brian’s made me glad of my pipe.

“ Western-Craggs, my cobber,” he answered.

“ They don’t say ‘ cobber ’ at Christ’s College, do they ? ”

“ My mate,” Brian corrected himself. He had slipped back as naturally into the vernacular of his old cronies as he had slipped into my unoccupied arm-chair.

“ He’s going to be an architect,” he went on. “ So am I.”

“ Did you tell him about Claribel Town ? ” I asked.

“ I nearly did,” said Brian.

“ Have you any other—er—cobbers ? ” I inquired.

“ No,” he replied. Then he added, somewhat irrelevantly I thought, “ I’m jolly glad you made me learn to swim before I went.” This looked like a preliminary to further revelations, but none were forthcoming.



## IN WHICH AN END IS CONSIDERED

"You're glad to be home?" I said after a prodigious silence.

"Rather," he answered.

Then something prompted me to try a barbed arrow. It was intended for my own breast, but Brian winced, and I was glad of it.

"I thought you would have grown out of all that Claribel business," I said.

"How do you mean, Uncle Dick?" he answered.

"There are so many other things when you go to school."

He had nothing to say for a while. He broke the silence with another irrelevancy.

"Western-Craggs is dead keen on heraldry, and he's got a ripping book about old clothes."

"You mean doublets and dalmatics and tabards and things."

"Yes."

"I think I should like Western-Craggs. He sounds a bit like young Luzifuz."

Brian laughed happily. "That's just what I thought," he said.

And thereupon we started again upon the

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

Christopher saga as if Brian had never been to school at all. I do not deceive myself. When next my nephew comes on holiday there will be no reprieve. That is why I seek to make an end of this work, in order that I may instruct M'Curdy to put the Gladstone bag out of sight, to await the day when Brian may read without embarrassment. So far I have selected as well as I can from a welter of detail. If I had only my own artistic conscience to satisfy I should close with the death of Christopher at the hands of the multitude. I have in mind some words of Plato. The world is ever ready to impale its idealists. The whole trend of modern literature is for the triumph of Jasperado and the disaffected potman. But then I have Brian to consider. He has allowed me to give our story an allegorical twist. In return I must concede to him the happy ending. I cannot kill Christopher. Brian has no flair for slaughter, an interesting phenomenon in a post-war child. I cannot even kill the Baldareel Buzz.

Should Brian think fit to seek a public for our tale he might add a chapter or two upon the rebuild-

## IN WHICH AN END IS CONSIDERED

ing of Claribel Town, embellished with sketches and plans. I fancy I shall hear much of the new town during the next month. In the meantime I must contrive somehow to get Christopher safely back to his place by the red curtain. I shall not attempt anything in this chapter. Let me round it off with a mention of something Shirley said when I bade the Somersets farewell at the railway station.

Conversation was not easy, I remember, for there were others. These included a glee party who lined up at the carriage window and chanted, "Will ye no' come back again?" and other appropriate dirges. Somerset espied me afar off and hauled me into the compartment, leaving Brian, who was acting as my escort, wedged between amateur tenors and pressmen on the platform. Shirley spoke of Willoughby Todd. She had heard him sing in Church on the Sunday she came to supper.

"If he were two years younger I should carry him off to England with me," I remember her saying.

"If I were ten years younger," I had replied,

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" I should follow with Mrs. Todd and the luggage. Yes, he's good enough for an English cathedral."

" I congratulate you, Maestro," she went on. " Willoughby and Brian ought to make you feel proud."

" Oh, Brian's no great shakes at a song," I had said.

" I wasn't referring to his voice," she replied, " I was referring to his smile."

Harris Tweeds realised that he had left the gossoon outside and made a dash for the platform.

" I don't see," I said.

" No, you don't," she replied with her funny little defiant laugh, " but I have seen. Do you still read Fiona Macleod ? "

" In homœopathic doses. Why ? "

" God builds the nest for the blind bird," she quoted.

" How very apt," I replied bitterly.

Her gloved hand slipped into mine.

" They say I turned you down. So I did. I just funk'd it."

" Why didn't you tell him ? " I asked.

## IN WHICH AN END IS CONSIDERED

“ I don’t know,” she answered. “ I somehow thought we would never meet.”

“ But we did.”

“ Yes,” she answered. “ It was pretty awful, wasn’t it ? ”

I almost shook her. “ Shirley,” I said, “ have you no heart at all ? ”

Then she came out with the thing I would have Brian remember.

“ And then I saw how God had built the nest. I would have made you wretched, Maestro. Don’t spoil a little miracle by thinking it would have been otherwise.”

“ What miracle ? ” I asked.

“ A miracle of nice adjustment. Moira thinks I am a sort of Juggernaut. If she only knew how I admire and envy her for being Brian’s mother.”

“ Really, Shirley,” I said, “ I fail to follow you.”

“ And I envy you,” she added swiftly, “ because you are making three people happy.”

At this point Somerset entered with Brian in tow, a dispatch case fell upon the head of Arthur Loft who had been carrying on an animated

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

conversation with all and sundry from a corner seat, and the serenaders struck up "Auld Lang Syne." I had no more word with Shirley except a final "Good-bye." I have often pondered her words. I do not think they were intended as a sop. Whatever virtues Shirley may lack, sincerity is not one of them. Well, Jerry, Moira, and Brian are happy to-night, and I must take Shirley's word for it that, along with the man who invented holidays, I am a contributor to that happiness. To-morrow I shall start upon the concluding chapters of our story. I shall miss Christopher when I have done with him. I am glad I have decided not to kill him off. When Brian is back at school and there comes no word from the Somersets, I may invoke him on my own account, but even our dream people do not go with us all the way.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

"I have loved the sunlight as any alive."

"You shall die at dawn," said they.

Henry Newbolt.

CHRISTOPHER laughed as he beat upon the Baldareel Buzz with his wooden sword. His laugh was smothered as the great red wings closed upon him, and for what seemed an age he fought desperately for breath and freedom. We have seen how he slipped downward from his enemy's embrace and rose again to find the red wings shrunken. Once more he faced his foe, but now it was not of the Baldareel Buzz that he thought. He was wondering what he would have to say to the people, a people dumbfounded at the disappearance of their town. He was fighting in the air for their freedom, and revelling in the fight. There was another and a harder fight awaiting him

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below. He would have to do battle for the new Claribel Town. He set his teeth.

"One thing at a time," he thought, and closed again.

The ballad sets forth how the three blasts blew and how the people turned to see their entire town had disappeared. In its place stood the collection of huts. Christopher was conscious of the cheer that rose from the men on the *Nautilla*. As he paused for a moment with the Baldareel Buzz perched, falcon-wise, on his shoulder, he experienced a great longing to make for the Wooden Ship. It would not be a difficult matter to persuade Lotus to set a course for England and drop him at Brian's Bay. He saw that they were crowding on sail and standing in towards the free port of Claribel, but even as he paused in the air the breeze dropped and the *Nautilla* came to a virtual standstill.

"Well," said the Baldareel Buzz, "you've done it now. They will be pleased."

"Of course they will," replied Christopher, on whom the irony of the remark was completely wasted.



## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

Quoth the spirit :

“ I am the Baldareel Buzz  
Invoked by the youth Luzifuz.  
The contract is over, the bargain is void,  
I built for a youth, and a youth has destroyed.  
But you who have trounced me with sword of your creed  
Shall be broken in turn by the fury and greed  
Of a multitude nurtured in stupor and sloth.  
You’ve dared overmuch, gallant lad, by my troth,  
For mine to command are a dark world’s resources,  
Mine is the power of engines and horses,  
Mine is the wealth that accrues from all dreams,  
Silk, gold, and sandal-wood, Lebanon beams,  
Men will not thank you for setting them free  
From such a dream of enslaved luxury.”

“ Really,” said Christopher, “ you ought to be in a pantomime, you old croaker. I’m going down to see what they think of it. I shall show them how to build the free city of Claribel.”

With one last look at the Wooden Ship below him he volplaned in the direction of the piazza.

\* \* \* \*

Among the first to recover from the paralysis of amazement were Jasperado and his followers.

“ You said the town should be ours,” growled the giant as he rounded savagely upon Titbash, “ and now there is no town.”

“ Let us take possession of what there is,”

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replied the little man in black. "Possession is nine points of the law. There may be another change. All enemies of the Wooden Ship to the plateau."

He ran forward towards the largest hut, followed by those men who had sat at the council table in the villa. The other folk of Claribel Town remained petrified for the time being. As Christopher started upon his downward flight the Baldareel Buzz played his last card.

"It will be very suitable if you land in front of the largest hut," quoth the spirit. The piercing gem-like eyes had noted the rush of Jasperado's men to that spot.

"I shall land where I can," Christopher said, but a strain of pride in him called for that central place. So it was that Christopher came to earth exactly where Luzifuz and his followers had stood so many years before. His landing almost amounted to a crash, but though the golden wings were crumbled he very quickly extricated himself.

"Where is the king?" he asked as he stood up with the Baldareel Buzz upon his wrist.

## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

He put the question before he had rightly scanned the faces of those about him. He had been stunned by his fall, but in a little while his vision cleared. He realised that those about him were not such as had much commerce with royalty. As Jasperado and his followers closed in upon him he saw no sign of congratulation in their faces. He saw only malevolent intentions towards himself and the old cringing awe of the Baldareel Buzz. These low-browed, long-armed men bore a traceable resemblance to those shaggy serfs who had flicked their tails and wended their way over the mountains when the work of building the first Claribel Town was ended. Christopher called to mind something one of the *Nautilla's* crew had said concerning the men who would not help with the wooden ship.

"Their fathers' fathers came from the north on a dark night." His mates had bade him hold his tongue, but Christopher had seen old Sir Luzifuz turn an ashen grey.

"Let those who have been in the north speak of the north, lad," the old councillor had said gently.

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Christopher remembered this, and, looking on the faces about him, he was afraid. It was strange that it should be thus in the hour of his victory. He who had risked so much by water and by air felt a sudden and overwhelming longing to feel the pasture of Brian's Bay beneath his feet. He thought of Topsy's golden hair with the blue snood that kept it in order ; he thought of the pattern that the sun used to throw on the school-room wall ; of Derek's small brown hand working its way across a page of foolscap as he toiled at his holiday task. He remembered how white Derek always managed to keep his collars, and how he always put the tip of his tongue out when he was absorbed in fractions or decimals. He remembered the black milk jug and the Demerara sugar in the bird's egg blue basin, and Topsy's arrangement of the flowers on the nursery breakfast table.

" Where is the king ? " he repeated.

Jasperado approached a step nearer, then drew back. Christopher saw how the sweat stood on his skull as his eyes went to the Baldareel Buzz.

" We cannot kill you for fear of touching a red

## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

feather," answered the cowering giant, " but you wait, Christopher, the Flying Fairy. You wait, Goldilocks. You wait, Bubbles, my pretty boy. You wait, Angel-face."

" You wait," growled the others in chorus.

" The Master still lives," went on Jasperado.  
" We serve the Baldareel Buzz."

" We serve the Baldareel Buzz, dead or alive," quoth Titbash.

" We serve the Baldareel Buzz," growled the others about him.

From the distance came the voice of a woman,  
" Give us back our town," she wailed.

Christopher could tell that beyond the circle of Jasperado's followers the multitude was beginning to move aimlessly.

" Give us back our town," came the cry from many voices.

" You hear that?" said Jasperado. " What do you think you have won ? "

" I will show them how to build a new town that shall be free," answered the Liberator.

" I am Jasperado, the wheelwright," replied

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his inquisitor. "I serve the Baldareel Buzz. The wheel that you have rolled back shall break you. There is only one way you can escape."

"Escape?" echoed Christopher; "who talks of escape?"

"Give us back our town," wailed the voices of people on the piazza and the water-front.

"Give us back our town," said Jasperado; "go down on your knees before the Baldareel Buzz and ask him to forgive and restore."

"What? Would you be slaves again?" demanded Christopher.

"The Baldareel Buzz is a good master," said Titbash.

"Do this or you die on the wheel," said Jasperado. "There is plenty of time. We can wait."

"Give us back our town," wailed the voices beyond.

On the water-front Nautilla was superintending the work of conveying the aged and infirm to the shelter of the marquee; not that shelter was immediately needed, for the afternoon was as

## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

still and warm as on that island wherein it seemed ever afternoon. Ever and anon she paused from her work to gaze out to sea. The *Nautilus* was making infinitesimal headway towards the free port of Claribel.

“ Oh, why did the breeze die ? ” she murmured.

King Kapok stood with his great cloak of state wrapped round him like a window curtain. The gilt chair from which he had sprung lay on its back upon the piazza. He stood thus rigid long after the multitude of his subjects had found feet and voices. Mr. Whippet kept pulling his note-book from his pocket and returning it with a gesture of despair at the thought of all that magnificent copy gone to waste. What is the use of copy without a printing press.

“ What is going to happen next ? ” asked Mr. Deputy of Mr. Vice.

“ Wait and see,” replied Mr. Vice to Mr. Deputy. Everyone waited for Christopher.

“ What is going to happen ? ” asked a lady in a gown of many flounces, who had come out to see the fun in her sedan chair.

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"We are going to be free, Lady," answered one of her attendants.

"And hungry," replied the other.

"No need," said the first. "The Lady Nautilla, they say, has organised the food supply. Then the port is free."

"I can well spare my house," said the woman whose child Nautilla had nursed. "My man will be back and the red wings are beaten."

"It was at your house he lodged, eh?" said a fishwife who stood by her. "What did the newspaper man give you for your tidings?"

"A gold piece," was the reply. "Do you think they will kill the Liberator? I should be sorry. He was a likeable young fellow, and because of him my little one shall have no more bad dreams."

"Likely as not they'll kill him. Why did the young fool not fly off when he had done the deed?"

As the latter spoke the little grey mother pushed past them. She was very white.

"He would not leave his task unfinished," she said. "He hoped to rebuild Claribel Town. You may have a voice in deciding his fate."



## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

“ We ? ” they laughed. “ Who are we ? ”

But Nautilla had passed on to her next task. On the plateau Christopher parleyed with Jasperado.

“ If I gave you back your town, what of me ? ” he asked.

“ A safe conduct to England,” replied the man who had put himself at the head of affairs in the room of King Kapok.

“ England ? ” Christopher spoke the word softly to himself. Better men than he had gone back to England defeated. Perhaps after all he had been mistaken when he heard Lotus blow the conch. If Claribel Town did not wish to be free, why should he die ? He would capitulate, go back to England, back to all those dear everyday sights and sounds. Nobody need have any idea that he had failed at the last hazard of all, that the men on the wooden ship had asked too much of him. The men on the wooden ship ! He grew sick at the sudden thought.

“ If I flatter your master back to his old size so that he may give you back your prison,” he said,

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

“ what of the chaps out there ? ” He pointed seawards. Jasperado leered down into his face.

“ The Baldareel Buzz knows how to deal with men of Roldo’s kidney,” he said.

“ We will console the widows and sweethearts,” said Titbash, screwing up one side of his face with a devilish wink. Jasperado tugged at the neck-band of his red shirt.

“ It will not matter then that they called me a mongrel,” he said.

There came a cry from the water-front. “ The *Nautilla*, the *Nautilla* ! ”

“ What of the *Nautilla* ? ” yelled Jasperado.

“ She is within the danger zone,” came the answer. Jasperado turned upon Christopher.

“ You have not much time, my pretty boy,” he said. “ The Baldareel Buzz must catch them. Otherwise you die on the wheel.”

Christopher threw back his head and laughed. “ Oh, the wild joy of having your mind made up for you,” he said, and lifting up his disengaged hand he brought it down with a smack on the head of the Baldareel Buzz. A little red butterfly

## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

fluttered away into the sunlight and Christopher's wrist tingled from the blow. In another moment the claw-like hands of Jasperado were about his throat.

"Don't throttle him, you fool! Remember the wheel," Christopher heard Titbash say as from a great distance. Then he heard and saw no more for a time.

From the immediate bystanders there went up a howl more awful in its dreariness than any cry of the desert or jungle. A breeze rustled suddenly through the branches that shielded the huts on the plateau. The *Nautilla* leapt forward towards the free port of Claribel, and, like the breeze in the branches, the word of what Christopher had done rustled from mouth to mouth and stirred the waiting people.

When King Kapok heard of it, he moved as a man wakened from a trance. "I must save him," he said, and made a step forward with a pathetic assumption of kingly dignity. Mr. Vice jerked him back by his voluminous cloak.

"You are not on in this scene," he muttered

## THE SHIP BEAUTIFUL

through his teeth, "and don't attempt a scene on your own account."

King Kapok did not respond to this treatment. He was not subdued. "Am I not a king, though I do sleep on the ground?" he demanded in a voice that cracked.

"You'll sleep under the ground if you try to meddle with these ghouls. Why save the boy? Hasn't he sent your palace up into the ether?"

"A curse on my palace," moaned the king, "a curse on my warming-pans. He has set us free, and we have betrayed him. We should have kept a watch on these fiends. We should—we should——"

Here his unhappy Majesty collapsed in a scarlet and gold heap upon the piazza and lay as still as the scarlet leaves that had ceased to move with the dying away of the wind.

When Nautilla heard of it she handed the work of housing and feeding over to her second-in-command.

"I must save him," she said. "I must find a way to the plateau."

## IN WHICH AN END IS POSTPONED

“ It would be death for you to go there,” said her informant. “ Death for you and worse than death for him. Jasperado’s gang hold the huts. He has the little black men at his beck and call.”

“ The little black men ! ” said Nautilla. “ Oh, if only the breeze had not died, the men on the Wooden Ship could save him.”

Then she seemed to be visited suddenly by some angel of decision, for without another word she turned and made all speed in the direction of Windsteeple Cove.

“ The little grey mother ! The little grey mother ! ” people called as she went, but she slipped from group to group so lithely that those who cried out caught but a passing glimpse of her, and in the general stir and hubbub she eluded all followers. Arrived at the track she ran like a hare towards the sea. The afternoon was well advanced when she came to the sand. Sobbing for breath, she flung herself upon her knees before a low white mound, lupin-covered, and began to burrow like a terrier after quarry. One might have thought her demented with grief as the sand flew

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to left and right, but Nautilla had a good hold upon her wits. She knew exactly what she was after. In a very short time the wooden sea chest lay revealed. Nautilla prised open the lid with little difficulty. Inside there were books, a bundle of clothes, and a package of tarpaulin. Nautilla took this latter upon her knee, and carefully pulled away fold upon fold of covering. Presently she came upon something that glinted in the mellowing sunlight.

\* \* \* \*

When Christopher came to his senses he was lying, bound hand and foot, in that very hut from which young Luzifuz had crept as a convalescent so many years ago. He was aware of a distant commotion. The islanders were crowding the water-front, discussing the disappearance of their town, whistling for a wind that would bring the Wooden Ship to port, and making preparations to sleep under the stars. Near at hand there was the jabber of the little black men and the sound of muffled colloquy near the entrance of the hut. Christopher could recognise the voices of Jasperado

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and the potman and realised that he lay under sentence of death. It was evident that Jasperado's gang held the huts and that the rest of the islanders would have no access to him, either for good or for ill. He would never know whether they regarded him as their liberator or as the destroyer of their city.

"Where are Lotus and his men?" was his thought, and the question was answered as Jasperado began to speak.

"Titbash is too clever by half," he growled. "What does he think he gains by waiting for the dawn? The wheel is ready; let the Flying Fox die by torchlight."

"Trust Titbash," replied the potman. "It is better to wait for the dawn. The people do not know their own minds concerning the boy. They think only of the Wooden Ship and of their supper. The Lady Nautilla has seen to that."

"A curse on the jade!" said Jasperado; "I did not know she had so many by the ears. When the prince comes ashore she will wheedle him, and you will hear him singing the praises of this

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flying devil. He will make it seem a good thing that he has destroyed the town. I am for killing to-night."

"Hasty! Hasty!" said the potman. "He shall die at dawn."

Christopher strained desperately at his bonds. It was awful to think that he would have no chance of pleading his cause with the people. He had fallen among thieves in the very hour of victory. There came the clatter of horses' hoofs.

"What news, Titbash?" cried the potman.

"The people have been fed," replied the little man in black with a bitter laugh. "They cannot make up their minds whether or not they want the blood of our young conjuror. Decision gives precedence to digestion. Their first passion has abated. A mob lynches without consideration. We saved him from that in order that he might expiate in a more seemly manner."

"Let us kill him to-night," said Jasperado. "Is not everything lost? There remains only revenge."

"There remain the huts," said the potman. "Are you not king of the huts?"



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“Bah!” said Titbash. “You are little better than a lump of bones and brawn, Jasperado. You have the brains of your father and your father’s father. You have no thought above killing. There are many things we may do with this boy before we kill him.”

“What can we do?” grumbled the giant.

“We may play him as a card against the prince,” replied Titbash. “The people fear the little black men. The people would have their town back. We can hold out a promise to them that the boy will yet coax the Baldareel Buzz to set his minions to work, and send them away to the place whence they came when the town is restored.”

“The Baldareel Buzz has flown away,” said the potman.

“The Baldareel Buzz may not have flown far,” Titbash replied. “There are ways of persuading the boy to seek the little red wings, gentle persuasive methods.”

The ropes about Christopher seemed to tighten as he noted the fiendish suavity with which the little man uttered these words. Oh, to be free for

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one hour ! If he should die without a word to the *Nautila's* men, his sacrifice might be in vain. The men who had not helped with the Wooden Ship might dominate the people for all time, and the new Claribel Town would never rise in the manner he had planned. He was filled with a terrible dread that his captors would be able to force a recantation from him. If, in some extremity of pain, he were to importune the Baldareel Buzz to show his power, what would become of Lotus and his men. They had flouted the spirit and expiation would be demanded. He had been summoned to a high adventure, but before the summons had come to him the enterprise was already under way. If he had refused to listen to the conch at the outset he would have betrayed Lotus and his men. He would have set the seal on their outlawry. He had not refused. He could not refuse. Even in that hour of desolation he seemed to be made aware of the secret of that morning's happiness, that morning when he saw the ship. For good or ill his lot was cast in with them. The sea that sparkled so joyously might

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drown him and engulf the ship. There would have been no adventure had there been no risk of disaster.

“ I can only hope for strength to stick it out,” he said to himself.

But a point had been reached in Christopher's affairs when another hand than his own was to guide his course. In the clearing at the rear of the hut someone else was putting all to the hazard on his behalf. The little black men went to and fro in couples, save for the odd man out, of whom no one had taken particular heed. He went in and out among Jasperado's followers jabbering like the others, but always slipped away when two of his mates approached. No one noticed his sudden and silent dive into the long grass at the rear of the hut where Christopher lay. In the brief tropical twilight the dark figure waited, crouched and still. The discussion at the entrance of the hut waned.

“ If you would take the advice of a wiser man than yourself, Jasperado,” said Titbash, “ you will sleep. That is what everybody else is thinking

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about. When the populace have exhausted the novelty of sleeping under the stars they will want to hear more of the Flying Boy."

"I do not sleep," replied Jasperado; "I guard the hut."

"Then with your leave I shall woo sweet dreams," replied Titbash. "We shall slumber well this still night. There's not a leaf stirring and the sails of the Wooden Ship are like the clothes of a hungry man. To-morrow we will have a reckoning. Good night."

He walked away with the potman to a neighbouring hovel. The dark figure crept inch by inch towards the burly sentry. The stars came out and lights twinkled from the water-front. Then for the first time upon that island echoes were aroused by a shot. Jasperado threw up his hands and fell heavily upon his face. An instant later the dark figure was within the hut.

"It is I, Nautilla. Where are you, Boy? I have killed a man, I think."

"Here I am, bound."

Christopher felt hands upon him that trembled

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as with an ague. A sharp knife parted the cords, and something cold was thrust into his hand.

"There is a horse tethered a little way off. Shoot everything and everybody that stands in your way. Ride for the Windsteeple Cove."

"But, you—you, Nautilla."

"Come along at once."

Shouts could be heard outside as Christopher scrambled to his feet.

"Take my hand," said Nautilla. Christopher was conscious of the night air and the stars, of figures that loomed up and fell away, of screams and curses. He plied his revolver, feeling all the time that there were other fingers than his own at the trigger. His assailants, totally unmanned by the terrible novelty of his weapon, fell away and in a minute Nautilla and he were mounted on the bare back of the steed and heading at a gallop for the Windsteeple Cove. Sticks, stones and clods of earth hurtled through the air after them as they went, and before they were clear of the settlement Christopher felt Nautilla's hold about his waist tighten convulsively.

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“ They’ve hit you, the brutes,” he called.

“ I’m all right. On ! On ! ” she made answer, and continued her directions in a voice that scarcely faltered. They raced down the slope that once had been Thistleup Lane, and so on to Doffing Row, and as they went the sound of cheering came faintly from the water front. Prince Lotus, weary of waiting for the command from his leader and despairing of a favourable breeze, had left the *Nautilla* in command of Sir Luzifuz, and come ashore in the cutter.

So it came about that Titbash was deprived of the trump card he had meant to play on the morrow. There could be no question of restoring the old Claribel Town, for the Liberator was no longer in the hands of those men whose purpose it had been to use him to that end. So it came about, too, that Christopher was rescued from martyrdom and cheated of a triumph by a woman, for it must be frankly confessed that he surrendered his will to that of *Nautilla* when he accompanied her on that wild scamper to the Cove. He reined in only at her bidding, and the spot

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she chose for their halt was the end of the path where grew the little blue flowers. There it was that they dismounted, and faced each other by the faint light of the stars, within sound of the breakers.

“ Well,” said Christopher, “ it looks as if I’ve run away, and you——”

Nautilla laughed. “ I’ve turned myself into Topsy—the real Topsy,” she said, and tugged at the beard till it came off in her hands.

“ Your beautiful hair,” said Christopher. “ Oh, Nautilla, what will Lotus say ? And you were hit—you were hit with a stone or something, and will that black ever come off your face. I say, I am a beast.”

“ It was nothing,” she replied. “ They would have killed you.”

“ I don’t know what to do,” said Christopher. “ It’s awful to think of you in such a mess. Here, let me bathe your head. Give me that knife.”

“ Are you going to make a worse mess ? ” asked Nautilla.

“ No,” he replied, “ I’m going to make a

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bandage," and taking the knife he ripped off the sleeve of his shirt.

"You are a funny boy," said Nautilla. "You can navigate a ship and destroy a town, but you don't seem to know how to treat an abrasion. I'm all right. Let's go and look for the dinghy."

"The dinghy?"

"Yes. I want you to row me to the Wooden Ship. Whoop! Get along home with you." This latter remark was addressed to the horse. There was the sound of whinnying and clattering hoofs as the animal obeyed.

"Where is he going? Where is home?" asked Christopher.

"Do you remember the farmstead where we used to go for the milk?" Nautilla replied.

"We? What do you mean, Nautilla," said Christopher, and as he spoke the noise of the surf sounded in his ears. "Where am I, Nautilla?" he asked. "Am I in Brian's Bay?"

"You are everywhere and nowhere," replied the laughing black figure before him. "See." She bent and plucked one of the little flowers that



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grew by the way. "You are at home, Boy, dear," she said. "Now let's go and find the dinghy."

"But Nautilla," said Christopher, "I don't understand. Why have you made such a golliwog of yourself. Why did you cut off your beautiful hair?"

"Because I didn't want them to cut off your beautiful head," she made answer. "These are sailor's clothes that I wear. They came out of an old sea chest. The revolvers came out of it, too. The rest was all done with a little faith and a cake of blacking."

Christopher regarded her with the solemnity of a small boy on his first visit to Madame Tussaud's. "I suppose you're a heroine," he said. "I've never met one before, though I've often read of them. I think you must be a first grade heroine, for it must take something for a beautiful person like you to make yourself look a fright."

"Oh, come and let's put out in the dinghy," replied the heroine.

"Is this the beginning or the end of my adventure?" asked Christopher. "Just now nothing

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seems real except the night air on my face and the jolly old sea. It's very hard to believe that I've been smashing things."

"You've broken an illusion, that's all," Nautilla answered. "The real adventure is only beginning. Come."

They put out from Windsteeple Cove as the quartermaster on the *Nautilla* struck four on the ship's bell, and after a long pull under the stars they picked up the lanthorn light on the masthead and approached to within hailing distance of the Wooden Ship.

"Ship ahoy!" called Christopher.

The voice of old Sir Luzifuz came across the water in reply. "Who goes there?"

"The destroyer of your city."

"It is well. Now are you free to build. I will have the gangway lowered."

"I have someone with me," called Christopher.

"Am I forgiven, Sir Luzifuz?" Nautilla's voice pleaded across the space of water.

"Ah, you are the young lady who broke in on my dream," said the old man.

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"Only when you were weary of your dream," Nautilla replied.

"Madam," said the councillor as the dinghy came alongside, "this ship is yours." Then he started back with surprise as his failing eyes focussed the little study in black and white below him.

\* \* \* \*

The *Nautilla* stood off from the free port of Claribel all that night, and at the dawning of the day she brought the blessing back. A breeze sprang up shortly before sunrise and filled her sails. The sight of the Wooden Ship sailing unchallenged into the port of Claribel reconciled the people to the loss of their town. It seemed to set a seal on all that the Prince had been so eloquently saying on the previous night. He had pleaded for Christopher with the people, urged them to face the problem of rebuilding their town in a spirit of hopefulness and comradeship. The cutter's crew had acted as leaven among the mass of the people, and the majority had lain themselves down to rest in the open air in the knowledge that

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though they were houseless citizens, they were free. Only on the plateau where the huts stood there was confusion and bitterness. Jasperado's followers had fallen upon the little black men in revenge for what they conceived to be an outrage on the part of one of their number, and the minions of the Baldareel Buzz had made off to the ravine, and so on to that other side of the island which shall no longer concern us. Jasperado had not been killed, and Christopher's fusillade had resulted only in a broken collar bone and a few flesh wounds distributed among the gang. Nautilla had the satisfaction of nursing these malcontents back to health. The mystery of her disappearance and reappearance on the quarter-deck of the Wooden Ship, with her hair cropped and old Sir Luzifuz' mantle over her shoulder, is jealously guarded by the few who are privileged to know. Sir Luzifuz was by her side as the vessel touched the crowded mole, but Christopher waited in his cabin for the verdict of the people. The cheers reassured him. The dawn had given way to day, and he was not to die.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HOME

We have hands that fashion and heads that know,  
But our hearts we lost—how long ago !  
In a place no chart or ship can show  
Under the sky's dome.

G. K. Chesterton.

**N**OW it remains for me to write of Christopher's home-coming. It cannot be said that his work upon the island is finished, for he has set something in motion which shall continue until the people of Claribel Town have wearied of beautifying their city with their own hands. May that day never come, but if there is to be a time when the people shall say, "Go to, we busy ourselves over a vain matter," Christopher is always to be found at his place by the red curtain. Herein does he differ from us all. He is truly at home. To refer once more to that ode of John Keats, he is like one of those figures on the Grecian urn, unwearied. He is eternally ready to start out upon his mission

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to put a wrong thing right. If Claribel Town needs him they know where to find him. The men on the wooden ship will not blow the conch in vain. Though I write " Finis " at the end of this chapter, it does not mean the end of Christopher. It only means the end of my task. Brian will come home again, and we will speak no more of the Boy on the Box, for both Brian and I are under the curse. We are without an abiding place. He cannot return and find things just the same as Christopher did.

This is how it happened. There came a morning in Claribel Town when Christopher realised that, for the time being, his work was done. He was standing at the door of the Office of Works with the completed plan of the new Claribel Town before him. Prince Lotus was by his side and they had just arrived at an agreement upon some point over which there had been a little controversy. Up through the clear morning air came the ring of hammers and of masons' trowels. The harbour was busy with shipping. A red-sailed scow was just rounding the long sea mole, and hard upon her

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came a fussy little tug towing a great lighter with a cargo of white marble that glistened in the sun. At her moorings lay the *Nautilla* looking like a beauty of some past day who had strayed unwittingly into a modern ballroom.

“ Well, that’s settled,” said Christopher. “ You can go ahead with a good heart.”

“ Why do you not say ‘ We can go ahead,’ Master ? ” said the Prince. “ This is your little party.”

Christopher narrowed his eyes as he looked towards the *Nautilla*.

“ She’ll be getting barnacles on her keel,” he said.

“ Who ? ” enquired the Prince, a little puzzled.

“ The Wooden Ship. Do you know, Lotus, I think it’s time that I was off and away. When is your wedding day ? ”

Prince Lotus frowned.

“ Oh, don’t look like that,” said Christopher. “ You remind me of the picture of the sulky boy. Don’t you want to marry the little grey mother ? ”

“ Of course I shall marry *Nautilla*,” replied the

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Prince, "but why do you speak of going away? I hate to hear you speak thus. It displeases me deeply, and when I am displeased I frown. As a matter of fact Nautilla rather likes my frown, but oh, Master——" And here he broke into rapid passionate speech, helped out with such ample gesture that Christopher was reminded of the time he had first set eyes on him, dancing and shouting upon the deck of the Wooden Ship. Again he was aware of that great happiness at his heart. How he loved these queer folk of Claribel Town with their sudden enthusiasms, their apparent incompetence, and withal capable of heroism and ready to sacrifice so much for the sake of an idea.

"I shall stay to see you married," he said gently, "and then you must come into your own. This is to be your town, not mine."

"Will you come back?" asked Lotus.

"I'll come if you really need me," replied the Liberator, "but you must really and truly need me. You must be bored with the new Claribel Town."



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“Never!” said the Prince.

Christopher smiled. “I shall always be ready to come,” he said.

“Why will you not stay?” said Lotus. “I would abdicate in your favour. *Nautilla* doesn’t want to be a queen. She told me so.”

“I’ll tell you why, Lotus, old boy,” said Christopher. “I’m a fellow with two homes, and just now I want to see the other home. I want to see it so much that it hurts. When you are married will you let me put a crew aboard the *Nautilla* and slip away? I want to see if Topsy and Derek and Aunt Mabel are all right. I want to be punched and scolded and called a butter-fingers and a sleepy-head. I want to see how much of my arithmetic I’ve forgotten. You’ll let me have the *Wooden Ship*, Lotus. I’ll take Jasperado for first mate and Titbash as chief steward, and when they’ve dropped me at Brian’s Bay they can come back.”

“Master, you know best,” said Lotus, “but I feel as if the sun had been put out.”

It accordingly came to pass that while the bells

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of Claribel Town were still pealing to celebrate the wedding of Lotus and Nautilla, Christopher went aboard the Wooden Ship, and the gangway was pulled up after him. First and foremost on the pier stood His Majesty King Kapok with the little grey mother, now all in white, upon his arm. At her side stood the Heir Apparent, white from plumed bonnet to high-heeled shoes. Old Sir Luzifuz in a whimsical mood had donned for the last time his suit of motley and leaned upon his stick on the left of the king. Mr. Vice and Mr. Deputy were also to be seen in the forefront. Christopher stood upon the quarter-deck of the *Nautilla* and smiled down upon the many-coloured throng. Behind those dear folk with whom and for whom he had striven, the new town of Claribel was beginning to rise in the room of the old bonded city. He had destroyed nothing that was essential. As if to emphasise this the islanders had dressed themselves in the old freakish way. There were acrobats, banditti, columbines, Damascene swordsmen, elves, firemen, goatherds, knights, jockeys, gondoliers, pierrots, a costume for every letter of

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the alphabet. Christopher looked upon them all, and if any touched his heart more than the rest, it was those incompetent but likeable mariners whom he had licked into shape. He knew that under those masquerading garments their hearts beat in unison with his. Everyone cheered and sang, and if some among the women wept, who shall blame them? There are tears in things and Christopher was leaving as he came with that same mysterious blend of happiness and pain in his expression. He stood alone in the hour of his triumph as he had stood alone in the hour of his trial. It shall not be said that the Princess Nautilla wept, though her eyes were softened with a dew such as you may see on the little blue flowers on the road to the farm at Brian's Bay. Save for the loss of those beautiful black braids there were no trace of the ordeal through which she had passed to rescue Christopher.

"You will come back to Brian's Bay some day," Christopher shouted to her.

"Not till Claribel Town is rebuilt," she called back.

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There are ghosts and ghosts. Many there are who haunt the spots where they have been most wretched, but there are some happy spirits who have a work in hand on the other side of the sea's rim and they send their thoughts back to the places where they have been most happy. Christopher came back to Brian's Bay because his work was finished. He is not a ghost and is happy wherever he is.

It is not necessary to write of the voyage to England. The regenerate Jasperado and his men did all that Christopher asked of them, and the trade winds did the rest. The *Nautila* sighted Brian's Bay at sunrise. Christopher had turned in early on the previous night, leaving an order that the red Canadian bathing suit should be placed by his bunk-side. When he came upon the sun-flooded deck he found his crew intent upon the low coast line. Jasperado turned from the bulwark at his approach. His stupid and brutal face lit with the wonder of new lands.

“ Will you not take us ashore with you, Master ? ”  
he asked.

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Christopher could not restrain a smile. It was funny to think of this Caliban of the island in the place of Lotus pleading for the privilege to accompany him on his long swim.

"I want you to go back and report my safe arrival," he answered. "Why not come with a ship of your own? Claribel port is free, you know."

"Maybe I will," said Jasperado.

Perhaps he has done so. You may meet him some fine morning at Plymouth or Tilbury.

Christopher waited through the day, wrote up his log, and indited long letters to Sir Luzifuz, Lotus and Nautilla. At dawn of the following day he went over the side with a little splash.

Of the rest there is little to tell. Brian's Bay had hardly wakened when his feet touched the sand. The while he had been swimming the daylight had broadened, and as he pattered up the cobbled street the first rays of the sun shot across the water. No one stirred in Sea View Cottage. I was wrong when I declared that never again did Aunt Mabel over-sleep herself. She was late on that morning when Christopher came back. He climbed up to

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Derek's window with the aid of the spouting and the Virginia creeper. It was an anxious moment for him before he ventured to peep inside. Supposing his papa had not taken Sea View Cottage for that summer. Supposing they had gone to Westgate-on-Sea or the Italian Lakes. Supposing a hundred dreadful eventualities. He braced himself against such dreary forebodings and softly lifted the sash. Derek lay fast asleep, and, wonder of wonders, there was the bed from which he had risen at the sound of the conch neatly made and empty.

“ I suppose he's having someone to stay with him, Billy Dickinson perhaps or one of the Digby twins—one of his cobbers.”

He made a skilful and burglarious entrance. Derek never stirred. Very softly he pulled out the second drawer of the chest by the window.

“ King Kapok never had such a bed as that,” he said to himself as he drew forth a white sleeping suit. To peel off his swimming attire was the work of a few seconds. Followed a few vigorous rubs with Derek's towel. Then, clad in the garb of

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the *Clarion* newsboy, he tiptoed to that alluring couch. He had pulled back the coverlet and was on the point of inserting himself between the sheets, when a sound arrested him, a sound whose vibrating sweetness filled the dark raftered room.

“ The conch,” he whispered. “ That’s Jasperado saying ‘ good-bye.’ ”

He crept to the door. Outside was a passage which led to a French window overlooking the sea. On summer nights this window was hooked back and its place taken by a red curtain. As Christopher went softly down the passage a cuckoo clock at the foot of the stairs behind him gave eight calls, but no one stirred in the lower regions. The cuckoo’s note ceased, and once again there was only the long fluting, louder and clearer now. Christopher reached the end of the passage and drawing back the curtain, gazed outwards.

Need I write of what he saw ? It is all on the lid of the tin box on my mantelpiece. Brian and I had our hero thus placed in position at the end of our last session.

THE END









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